ALIENS™

OMNIBUS

VOLUME 1

Billie only wanted what all children want—the warmth and security of family, the human connectedness that comes from belonging. What she *got* was a nightmare without end. Wilks was a space marine with a near-fatal flaw: he had a heart. Thrown together in the last hellish night of an Alien invasion of a far-flung colony outpost, Billie and Wilks fought together to survive. Thirteen years later, Wilks is in prison and Billie lives in a mental institution, the nightmare memories of the massacre at Rim seared into her mind. Now the pair get a chance to be reunited, to return to that outpost where it all happened, to finally end the business between themselves . . . and the Alien monsters that altered their destinies and destroyed their dreams.

Dark Horse Comics took the industry by storm with its release of *Aliens*, a comics series that for the first time captured the power of film source material and expanded its universe in a way that fans applauded worldwide. Now, the core Dark Horse *Aliens* series—*Outbreak*, *Nightmare Asylum*, and *Female War*—are collected in a value-priced, quality-format omnibus, featuring nearly 400 story pages in full color. Written by screen and television scribe Mark Verheiden and illustrated with consummate skill by Mark A. Nelson, Den Beauvais, and Sam Kieth, *Aliens Omnibus Volume 1* is an essential piece of the *Aliens* mythos and a great entry point into the storied Dark Horse *Aliens* library.

DARK HORSE BOOKS

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ISBN 978-1-59307-727-3
52495>
9 781593 077273

$24.95 U.S.

foxmovies.com

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1

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Special thanks to **DEBBIE OLSHAN** at Twentieth Century Fox Licensing.

ALIENS™ OMNIBUS Volume 1
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This volume collects material previously published as the Dark Horse graphic novels *Aliens: Outbreak*; *Aliens: Nightmare Asylum*; and *Aliens: Female War*; and stories from the Dark Horse comic book *Dark Horse Presents: Aliens Platinum Edition*.

Dark Horse Books
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie OR 97222

darkhorse.com | foxmovies.com

To find a comics shop in your area, call the Comic Shop Locator Service toll-free at 1-888-266-4226

First edition: July 2007
ISBN 978-1-59307-727-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3
Printed in China

OUTBREAK
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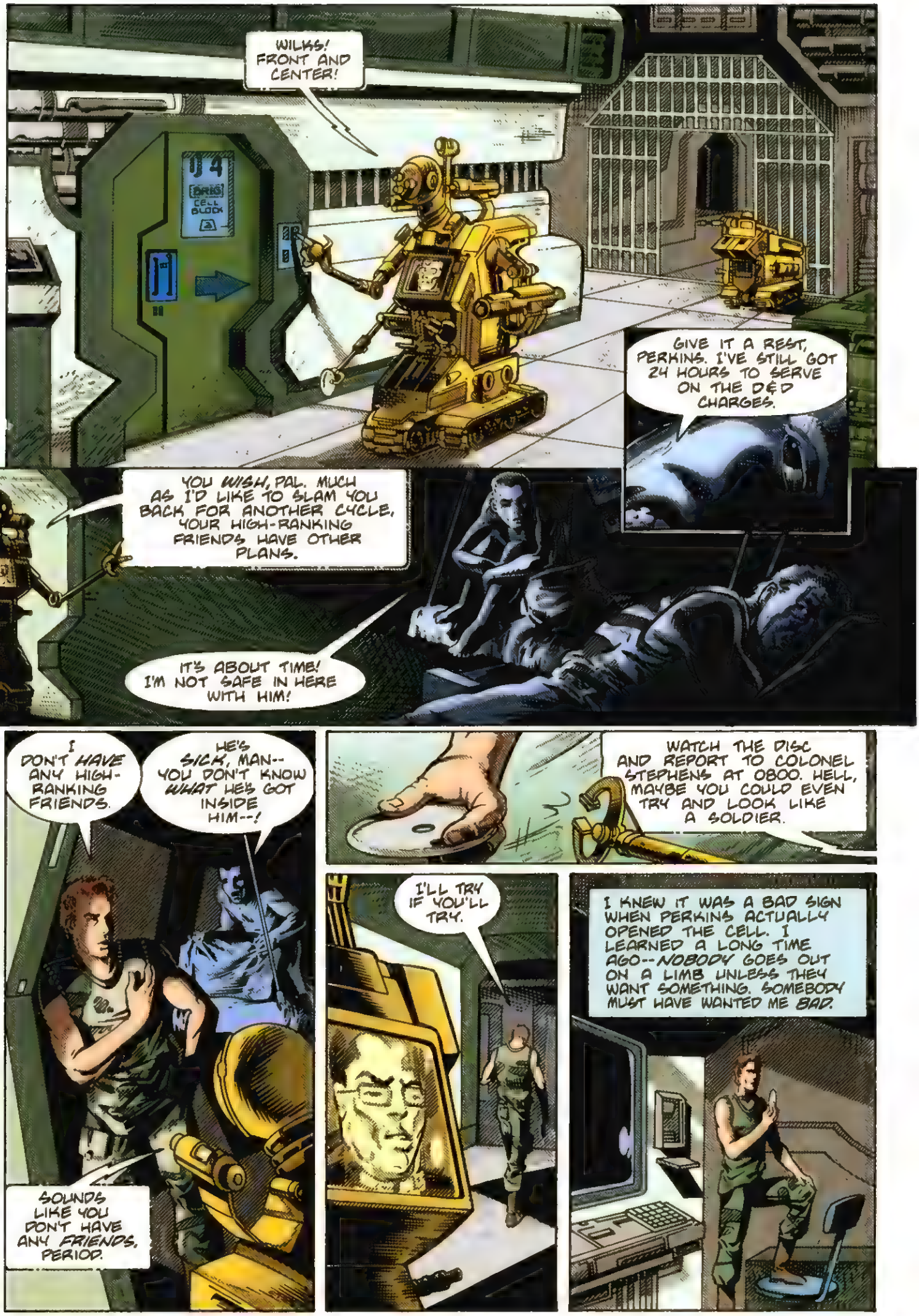
DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT LAST NIGHT?
WHY? IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.
GIVE ME A TRY.
IT STARTED WHEN MY FRIEND CARLY FOUND AN OLD DISC ABOUT CAMPING--YOU KNOW, THE REAL STUFF, ABOUT THE REAL LAND. THE DISC TALKED ABOUT THE CAMPING FIRE AND SING-AROUND SONGS.
WE "BORROWED" A CRAWLER AND DROVE OUT TO ONE OF THE REMOTE GENERATOR BUILDINGS.
WE COULDN'T LIGHT A FIRE, BUT WE PLUGGED A CRAWLER HEATER INTO ONE OF THE BATTERY OUTLETS AND GOT CLOSE TO KEEP WARM.
I'M FREEZING! WHO'S IDEA WAS THIS?
YOURS, POWER-DRAIN!
I REMEMBER THINKING HOW MUCH I LIKED BEING THERE, AWAY FROM THE COLONY AND THE MACHINES--JUST ME AND MY FRIENDS.
WHAT ELSE DID THEY DO ON THE DISC, CARLY?
THEY BURNED RATIONS OVER A FIRE, WHICH SEEMED KINDA DUMB. AND SOMETIMES THEY...
SOMETIMES THEY TOLD STORIES. SCARY STORIES.

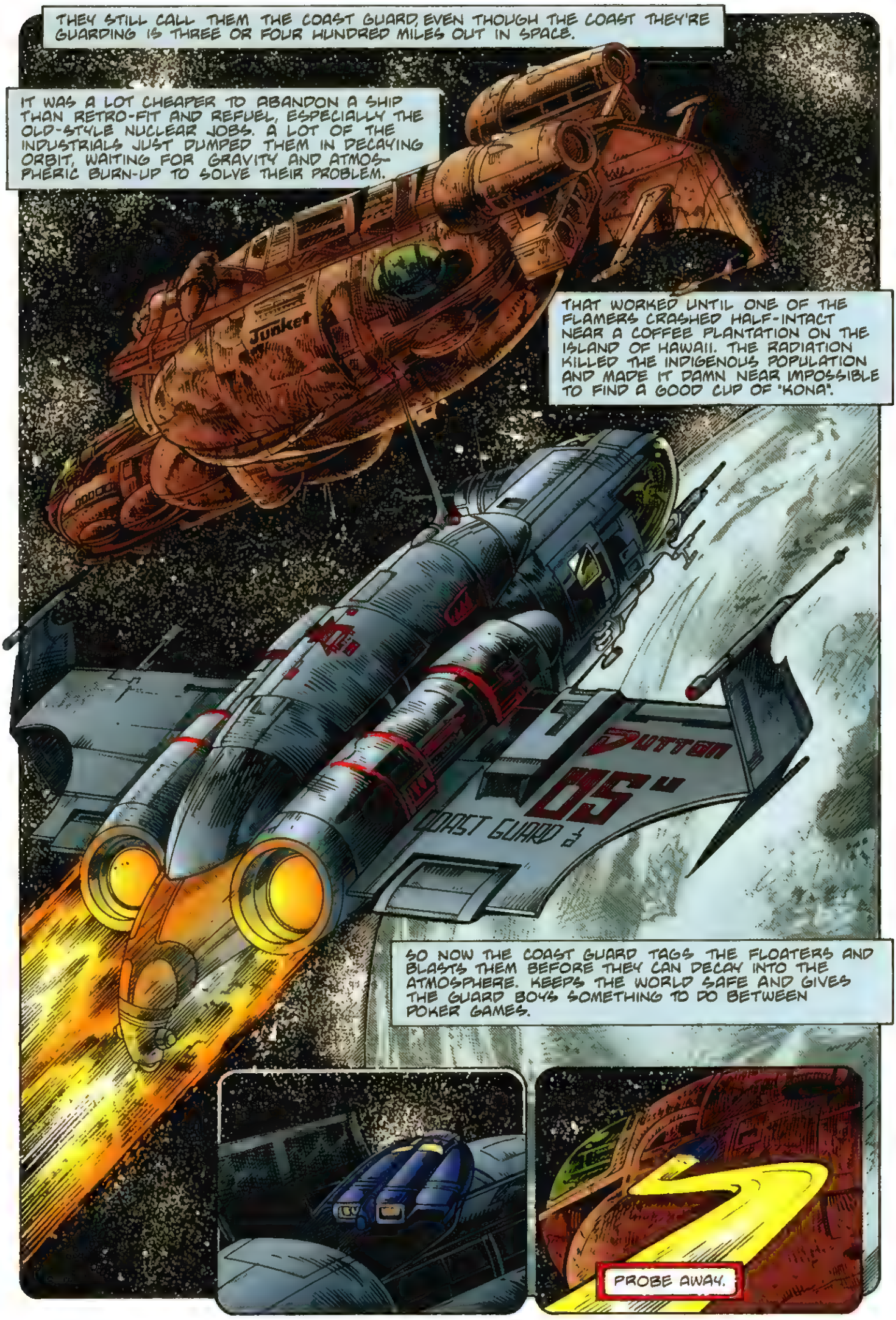
CARLY WENT FIRST. IT WAS SOMETHING ABOUT VAMPIRES AND WITCHES AND MONSTERS. I KNEW IT WAS STRAIGHT OUT OF THE DISC LIBRARY, BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER. WITH THE WIND AND THE RAIN AND THE HUM OF THE HEATER, IT WAS AS SCARY AS ANY VIDEO.
GOD! I HATE VAMPIRES!
SHHHH!
...AND THEN...HE DRANK... ALL OF HER... BLOOD!!
ABOUT THEN, THE HEATER STOPPED WORKING. MAYBE IT WAS A SHORT. EVERYTHING TURNED COLD AND BLUE AND I STARTED TO SHIVER.
YOUR TURN, BILLIE. WHAT'S THE SCARIEST THING YOU EVER SAW?
NO. I WANT TO GO BACK!
IT WAS YOUR IDEA, BILLIE. DON'T CHICKEN OUT NOW--!
I KNEW IF I DIDN'T TELL THEY'D NEVER GO BACK.
OKAY, OKAY. I KNOW A STORY ABOUT A REAL SCARY WITCH AND--
A WITCH? DON'T BE STUPID!
YOU KNOW SOMETHING SCARIER THAN THAT! TELL US!
PL--PLEASE-- CAN'T WE GO BACK--
TELL IT!
I STARTED TO GET MAD AT THEM, PICKING ON ME LIKE THAT, ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS GO HOME. I DECIDED TO TELL THEM THE SCARIEST STORY I KNEW.
THERE ARE THESE-- THINGS-- THAT LIVE IN SPACE. THEY LIVE TO FEED-- AND TO HATE.
BETTER!

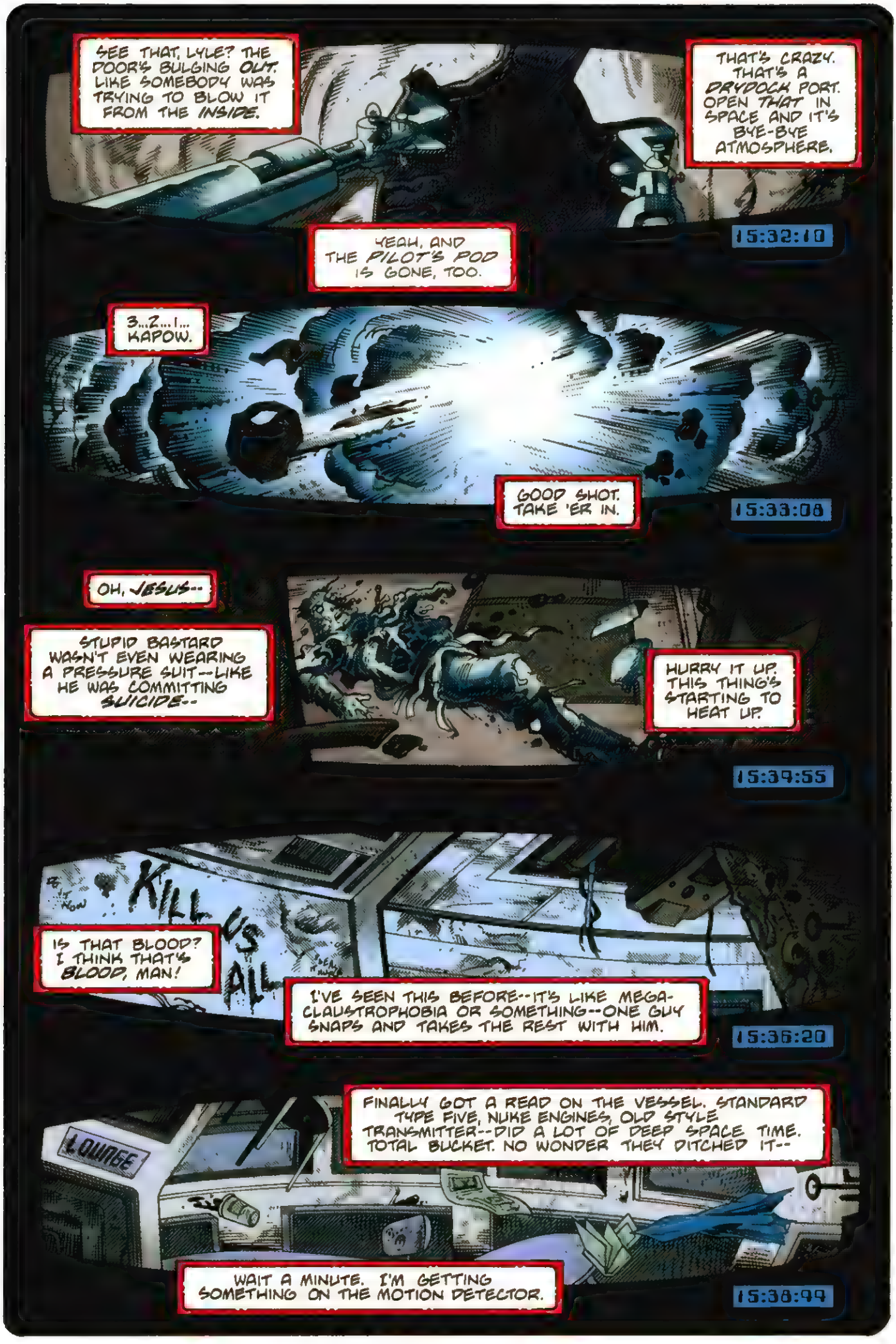
THEY HAVE ACID FOR BLOOD AND SKIN AS HARD AS HULL STEEL. YOU DON'T SEE THEM UNTIL THEY'RE ON TOP OF YOU. AND THEN ALL YOU SEE ARE THE TEETH, GLITTERING LIKE SPARKS AS THEY SNAP--
MAYBE THEY'RE FROM ANOTHER WORLD, OR MAYBE THEY JUST EXIST IN THE BLACK HELL OF SPACE, FEEDING ON ANYTHING THEY FIND. IT DOESN'T MATTER.
NOTHING MATTERS BUT THOSE TEETH, SNAPPING SHUT ON BONE AND BRAIN TEARING, CUTTING, CRUSHING--
I--I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD--
BUT IT DOESN'T END IN DEATH.
THEY USE WHAT'S LEFT FOR BREEDING, BURROWING INTO THE TISSUE, SPREADING LIKE CANCER, UNTIL THE PARASITE IS WHOLE, UNTIL THE HATE CAN BUILD AGAIN AND AGAIN AND--
MAG! WHAT'S WRONG?
SOMETHING--IS--AAA--
AAAAAGGGGH!
OH GOD, NO!
I DON'T FEEL--
NOT AGAIN! NOT AGAIN!
I GUESS THAT'S WHEN YOU FOUND ME IN THE HALL, SCREAMING.
BILLIE! WAKE UP! YOU'RE DREAMING!
IF YOU'RE FEELING BETTER, I'LL LOOSEN THE STRAPS.
YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU WANT. IT WON'T STOP THE DREAMS. NOTHING CAN STOP THE DREAMS.

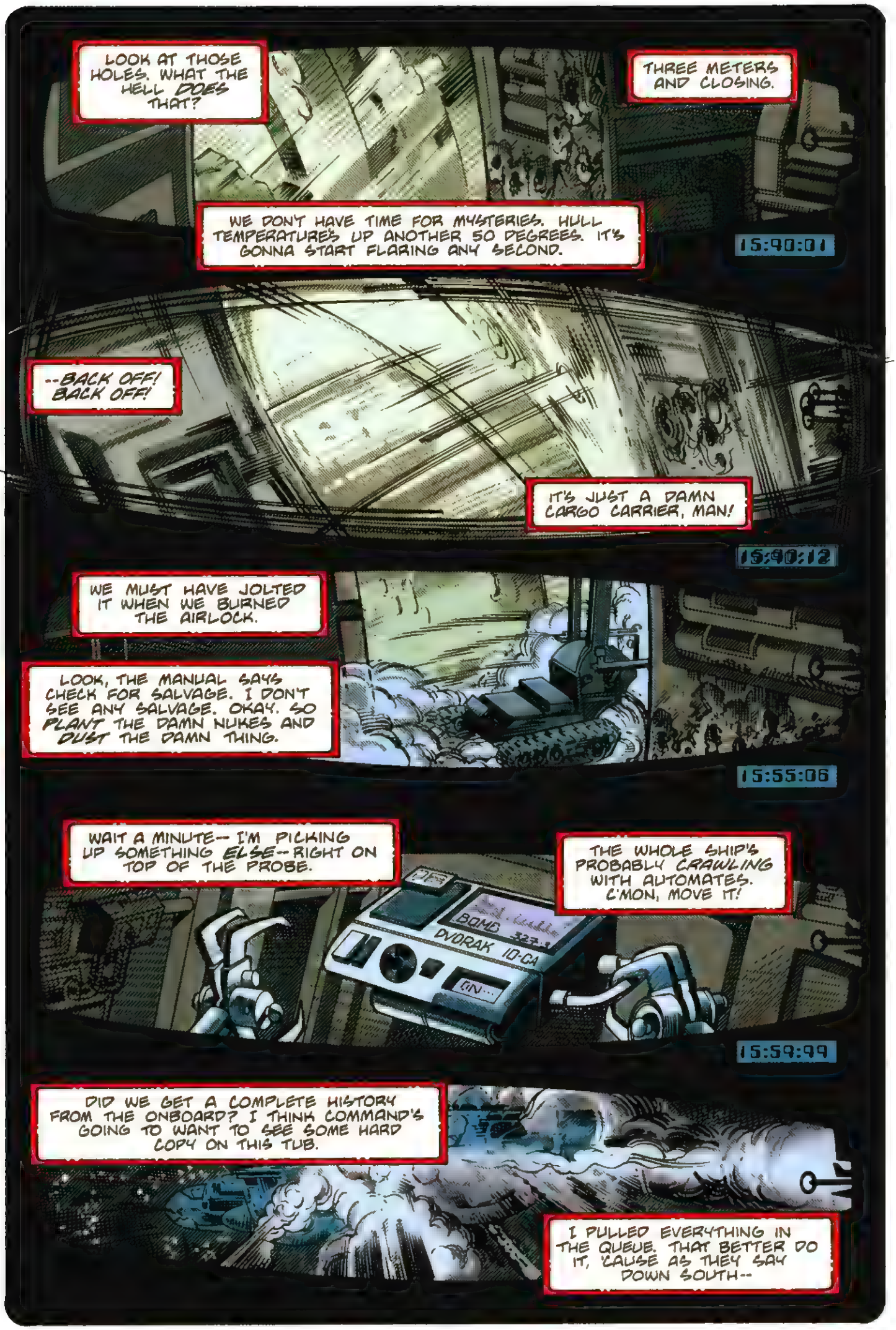
NOTHING CAN STOP THE DREAMS.
THEY'RE ALL AROUND US, MAN!
THEY'VE GOT DRAKE AND VASQUEZ PINNED IN THE GENERATOR STATION, WILKS!
KNOCK IT OFF!
STICK TOGETHER AND WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS.
ME AND FROST'LL TAKE THE FRONT. QUINN-- LAY DOWN SOME KICK-ASS COVER. THE REST OF YOU EASE AROUND BACK. WE'RE GONNA OUTFLANK THESE MOTHERS.
OUTFLANK THESE MOTHERS.
JASPER!
HONEY, I'M GOING TO HAVE THE PRIVATE TAKE YOU TO THE--
DON'T LEAVE ME.
IT'S GOING TO BE FINE. I'LL BE BACK.
BOM-BOM-BOM!
DIE DIE DIE!
WE GET OUT OF THIS, WILKS, AND I'M BUYING YOU A DRINK.
WHEN WE GET OUT OF THIS YOU'RE BUYING ME THE WHOLE DAMN REFINERY.
OKAY--ON MY COUNT. ONE-- TWO--
GENERATOR ROOM

THREE!!
BABAMBABAMBAB
FROST--! VASQUEZ... DRAKE! THEY'RE BOTH DEAD! SOMETHING-- INSIDE THEM--
FROST?
ELLIS! QUINN! GIVE ME A FIX ON YOUR POSITION! THERE'S SOMETHING DAMN STRANGE IN--
HELP ME, WILKS-- DON'T LEAVE ME--
NO-- NO--


WILKS! FRONT AND CENTER!
J4
BRIG
CELL BLOCK
GIVE IT A REST, PERKINS. I'VE STILL GOT 24 HOURS TO SERVE ON THE D&D CHARGES.
YOU WISH, PAL. MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO SLAM YOU BACK FOR ANOTHER CYCLE, YOUR HIGH-RANKING FRIENDS HAVE OTHER PLANS.
IT'S ABOUT TIME! I'M NOT SAFE IN HERE WITH HIM!
I DON'T HAVE ANY HIGH-RANKING FRIENDS.
HE'S SICK, MAN-- YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S GOT INSIDE HIM--!
SOUNDS LIKE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS, PERIOD.
WATCH THE DISC AND REPORT TO COLONEL STEPHENS AT 0800. HELL, MAYBE YOU COULD EVEN TRY AND LOOK LIKE A SOLDIER.
I'LL TRY IF YOU'LL TRY.
I KNEW IT WAS A BAD SIGN WHEN PERKINS ACTUALLY OPENED THE CELL. I LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO--NOBODY GOES OUT ON A LIMB UNLESS THEY WANT SOMETHING. SOMEBODY MUST HAVE WANTED ME BAD.


THEY STILL CALL THEM THE COAST GUARD, EVEN THOUGH THE COAST THEY'RE GUARDING IS THREE OR FOUR HUNDRED MILES OUT IN SPACE.
IT WAS A LOT CHEAPER TO ABANDON A SHIP THAN RETRO-FIT AND REFUEL, ESPECIALLY THE OLD-STYLE NUCLEAR JOBS. A LOT OF THE INDUSTRIALS JUST DUMPED THEM IN DECAYING ORBIT, WAITING FOR GRAVITY AND ATMOSPHERIC BURN-UP TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM.
Junket
THAT WORKED UNTIL ONE OF THE FLAMERS CRASHED HALF-INTACT NEAR A COFFEE PLANTATION ON THE ISLAND OF HAWAII. THE RADIATION KILLED THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION AND MADE IT DAMN NEAR IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND A GOOD CUP OF 'KONA'.
Dutton
05
COAST GUARD
SO NOW THE COAST GUARD TAGS THE FLOATERS AND BLASTS THEM BEFORE THEY CAN DECAY INTO THE ATMOSPHERE. KEEPS THE WORLD SAFE AND GIVES THE GUARD BOYS SOMETHING TO DO BETWEEN POKER GAMES.
PROBE AWAY.


SEE THAT, LYLE? THE DOOR'S BULGING OUT. LIKE SOMEBODY WAS TRYING TO BLOW IT FROM THE INSIDE.
THAT'S CRAZY. THAT'S A DRYDOCK PORT. OPEN THAT IN SPACE AND IT'S BYE-BYE ATMOSPHERE.
15:32:10
YEAH, AND THE PILOT'S POD IS GONE, TOO.
3...2...1... KAPOW.
GOOD SHOT. TAKE 'ER IN.
15:33:08
OH, JESUS--
STUPID BASTARD WASN'T EVEN WEARING A PRESSURE SUIT--LIKE HE WAS COMMITTING SUICIDE--
HURRY IT UP. THIS THING'S STARTING TO HEAT UP.
15:39:55
KILL US ALL
IS THAT BLOOD? I THINK THAT'S BLOOD, MAN!
I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE--IT'S LIKE MEGA-CLAUSTROPHOBIA OR SOMETHING--ONE GUY SNAPS AND TAKES THE REST WITH HIM.
15:36:20
LOUNGE
FINALLY GOT A READ ON THE VESSEL. STANDARD TYPE FIVE, NUKE ENGINES, OLD STYLE TRANSMITTER--DID A LOT OF DEEP SPACE TIME. TOTAL BUCKET. NO WONDER THEY DITCHED IT--
WAIT A MINUTE. I'M GETTING SOMETHING ON THE MOTION DETECTOR.
15:38:44


LOOK AT THOSE HOLES. WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT?
THREE METERS AND CLOSING.
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR MYSTERIES. HULL TEMPERATURE'S UP ANOTHER 50 DEGREES. IT'S GONNA START FLARING ANY SECOND.
15:40:01
--BACK OFF! BACK OFF!
IT'S JUST A DAMN CARGO CARRIER, MAN!
15:40:12
WE MUST HAVE JOLTED IT WHEN WE BURNED THE AIRLOCK.
LOOK, THE MANUAL SAYS CHECK FOR SALVAGE. I DON'T SEE ANY SALVAGE. OKAY. SO PLANT THE DAMN NUKES AND DUST THE DAMN THING.
15:55:06
WAIT A MINUTE-- I'M PICKING UP SOMETHING ELSE--RIGHT ON TOP OF THE PROBE.
THE WHOLE SHIP'S PROBABLY CRAWLING WITH AUTOMATES. C'MON, MOVE IT!
BOMB
DVORAK ID-CA
15:59:99
DID WE GET A COMPLETE HISTORY FROM THE ONBOARD? I THINK COMMAND'S GOING TO WANT TO SEE SOME HARD COPY ON THIS TUB.
I PULLED EVERYTHING IN THE QUEUE. THAT BETTER DO IT, 'CAUSE AS THEY SAY DOWN SOUTH--

HASTA LA VISTA!
PROBE TWENTY METERS AND CLOSING.
DAMN, THESE CONTROLS ARE SLUGGISH.
YEAH? THAT'S WHY WE STILL HAVE JOBS. COMPENSATE, BOY! COMPENSATE!
TEN METERS AND CLOS-- TOO FAST! SLOW IT DOWN, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!
I'M TRYING-- SOMETHING'S INHIBITING THE LEFT RETRO!
AIRLOCK DOORS OPEN.
I'M KICKING SOME TECH ASS IF THEY MESSED WITH THE RETRO SYS--
WHAT IN THE HELL--?
DOORS OPEN
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE--
16:03:03

THAT'S TOTAL VACUUM--AND IT'S ALIVE--!
THIS IS PROBE SHIP DUTTON--WE--WE'VE PULLED SOMETHING IN FROM--

MAYBE IT'S SOME KIND OF--PARASITE--OR--

THAT'S NO PARASITE--

--OH MY GOD!

IT'S GOING TO--

GAHHHHVVVV--*
SCRAWM

I KNEW IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE IT HAPPENED. THAT'S WHY THE MARINES NEVER KICKED ME OUT OF THE CORPS. THEY KNEW IT, TOO.
I SAW A GUY TEAR HIS SUIT ONCE. HE HAD TIME FOR ONE SCREAM--THEN HIS BLOOD BEGAN TO BOIL--
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, THOSE BOYS ON THE COAST GUARD SHIP WERE LUCKY.
PROBE SHIPS WEREN'T DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND A HULL BREACH. THE ALIEN WAS CLEVER, BUT NOT THAT CLEVER.
THE SHIP EXPLODED, TAKING THE ALIEN SON OF A BITCH WITH IT. BUT PROOF OF THE ONE MEANT THERE WERE MORE.
SHIP TERMINATED.
NO SURVIVORS.
WHAT WAS THE OLD PHRASE? "WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S FIRE." YEAH-- THE FIRES OF HELL.

YOU'RE LATE.
GET OFF MY BACK, SALVAJE. YOU'RE LUCKY I'M HERE AT ALL.
Excerpts from the book *The Evolution of Television* by Emmett Webster, DH Press, 2057: Commercial television as it was known in the 1980s and '90s disappeared with the application of superconductive transmission technology to the then-existent cable television systems.
BETWEEN THIS SHIT AND MY DAY JOB, IT'S LUCKY I FIND TIME TO SLEEP.
THE CAUSE IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR SLEEP.
YEAH-- THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY.
With systems offering 500, then 1000, and eventually *5000* channels, it became economically infeasible for advertisers to support mainstream dramatic programming. Soon, instead of hundreds of thousands of viewers, audience shares were calculated in the *tens*.
With the dissolution of the FCC, cable access was open to all persuasions. In a resurgence similar to that seen during the mid-1980s, religious programming became a television staple, outnumbering non-doctrinal programs nearly 100 to 1.
JEEZ-- THIS THING'S AN ANTIQUE. IT MUST WEIGH TWO OR THREE POUNDS!
BE CAREFUL. IT TOOK MONTHS TO LOCATE.
I'LL SET IT ON A MEDIUM SHOT, YOU AND THE BACKDROP. PRETTY DULL STUFF COMPARED TO THE SOUND MASSAGE AND SUBLIMINALS YOUR COMPETITION'S BEEN USING--
THE TRUTH OF MY MESSAGE WILL SHINE LIKE A BEACON. THE OTHERS ARE PRETENDERS--
I PREACH THE GOSPEL OF--

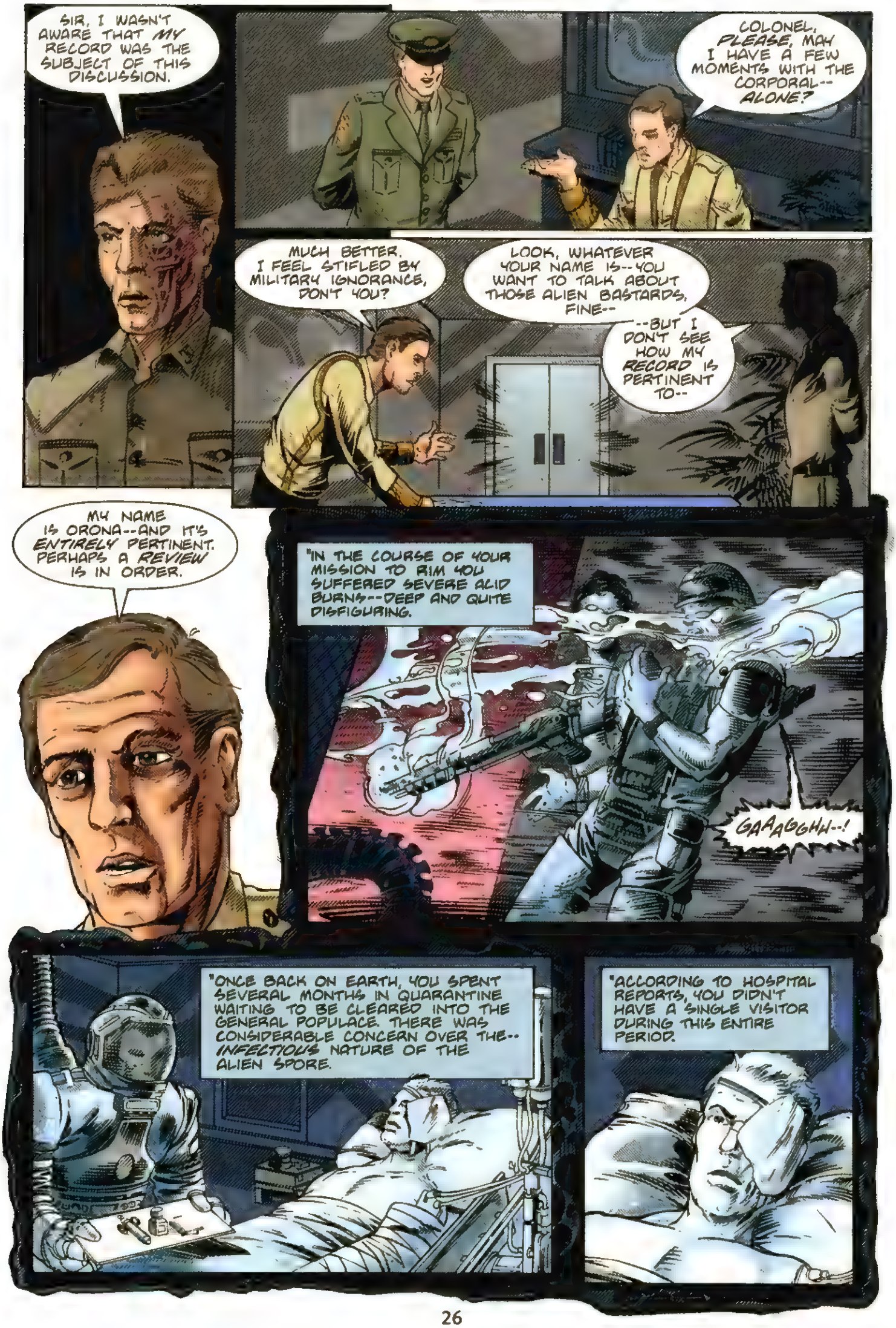
IT'S YOUR MONEY. GET READY-- I SHOULD HAVE YOU ON IN A COUPLE OF MINUTES.
With so many programs to choose from, viewer perceptions changed. Much as the fast-cut visual styles of the '90s were defined by 5, then 2 second commercials, the style of mid-century programming was changed with the introduction of the retinal switch, or "eye-box."
I KNOW THERE ARE OTHERS WITH THE VISION. OTHERS WHO HAVE HEARD THE CALL THESE PAST FEW MONTHS.
--THE TRUE MESSIAH--!
The "eye-box" was designed to detect minute changes in the capillaries of the retina, initiating random channel changes based on involuntary blood pressure fluctuations. To hold audiences, programmers were forced to devise new styles of programming that would not "trip" the eye-box switcher.
IT'S OKAY, DOC. I HOOKED UP A GUY LAST WEEK WHO SAID THE MESSIAH WAS PLAYING THIRD BASE FOR THE OSAKA PISTONS.
DOESN'T MATTER TO ME.
BUT IF THAT THING'S GOD..
...GIMME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION.

HI, BILLIE-- CHECK OUT DIDI-- SHE'S AVERAGING 50 SWITCHES A-- HEY!
GREAT. CAN'T EVEN WALK STRAIGHT.
I WANT YOU--
--TO JOIN OUR--
3215
DOCTOR HILL'S GOT YOU BLUED AGAIN, DOESN'T HE?
THAT'S THE TREATMENT ISN'T IT?
--COMPASSION AND LOVE AND--
958
YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG, BILLIE. IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS YOU'LL GET YOUR HEARING AND--
I'LL NEVER MAKE IT. EVERYTHING'S SLIPPING AWAY-- MEMORY CONTROL-- CAN'T EVEN WALK--
1492
BAD DREAMS? SEDATIVES. CAN'T EAT? SEDATIVES. TALK OUT OF TURN? SEDATIVES.
--GET YOUR ATTENTION--
--FOR THE NEW WORLD OF--

THE DOCTORS CAN'T FIGURE ME OUT. I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING-- I JUST DON'T "GET ALONG." IS THAT CRAZY?
BILLIE-- THEY'RE GOING TO HEAR--
BAM
BAM
I DIDN'T ASK TO BE BORN OUT THERE! NOBODY WARNED ME ABOUT THE RISKS!
BILLIE! PLEASE!
--THE CHURCH OF IMMACULATE INCUBATION--
YOU CAN'T GET IT OUT OF ME WITH DRUGS! I SAW THEM TEAR MY MOTHER APART LIKE A DOLL!
AND THEY'RE STILL OUT THERE!
--SEEKS THE ULTIMATE COMMUNION WITH THE TRUE--
FREEZE IT. THERE.

WHAT WAS THAT OLD SLOGAN? "THE MARINES WANT A FEW GOOD MEN." I REALLY BELIEVED THAT KIND OF SHIT WHEN I SIGNED ON. THAT WAS BEFORE RIM. BEFORE I CAME HOME.
I HADN'T BEEN OFF BASE IN YEARS. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO REMEMBER WHY.
LANCE CORPORAL WILKS TO SEE COLONEL STEPHENS.
OH--! I MEAN--I'M SORRY--THEY'RE EXPECTING YOU--
I'D HEARD ABOUT STEPHENS--SPECIAL PROJECTS MAN. HE HAD ZIP COMBAT EXPERIENCE, BUT FANCIED HIMSELF A REAL WARRIOR. EASY TO DO IN PEACETIME.
CORPORAL WILKS? I--I'M GLAD YOU COULD MAKE IT DOWN. AT EASE.
HE KEPT HIS HANDS BEHIND HIS BACK. AFRAID TO TOUCH ME.
I TAKE IT YOU'VE SEEN THE DISC ON THE DUTTON.
YESSIR.
THEN YOU KNOW--
I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE SOME--EXPERIENCE--IN THESE MATTERS.
DOCTOR, PLEASE--LET ME HANDLE THE--
WELL? IS IT TRUE?
YESSIR. YOU COULD SAY THAT.

I WAS PART OF A DETATCHMENT SENT TO INVESTIGATE LOSS OF CONTACT WITH A TERRAFORMER COLONY ON THE PLANET RIM. COMMAND SUSPECTED AN ALIEN PRESENCE WAS INVOLVED.
THE COLONY HAD BEEN RANSACKED. WE FOUND A SINGLE SURVIVOR--A YOUNG GIRL NAMED BILLIE. THE REST OF THE COLONISTS WERE DEAD.
BEFORE THE SQUAD COULD EFFECT DUST-OFF. WE WERE FORCED TO ENGAGE THE ALIEN ENEMY IN CLOSE QUARTERS.
OTHER THAN MYSELF, A CIVILIAN WOMAN, AND THE YOUNG GIRL, NO ONE FROM THE MISSION SURVIVED.
SURVIVAL IS SUCH A *RELATIVE* TERM, CORPORAL WILKS. I'VE BEEN READING YOUR FILE.
YOU HAD A STERLING RECORD PRIOR TO THE RIM MISSION.
SINCE YOUR RELEASE FROM MEDICAL THIS SEEMS TO HAVE-- *CHANGED.*


SIR, I WASN'T AWARE THAT MY RECORD WAS THE SUBJECT OF THIS DISCUSSION.
COLONEL, PLEASE, MAY I HAVE A FEW MOMENTS WITH THE CORPORAL-- ALONE?
MUCH BETTER. I FEEL STIFLED BY MILITARY IGNORANCE, DON'T YOU?
LOOK, WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS--YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THOSE ALIEN BASTARDS, FINE--
--BUT I DON'T SEE HOW MY RECORD IS PERTINENT TO--
MY NAME IS ORONA--AND IT'S ENTIRELY PERTINENT. PERHAPS A REVIEW IS IN ORDER.
"IN THE COURSE OF YOUR MISSION TO RIM YOU SUFFERED SEVERE ACID BURNS--DEEP AND QUITE DISFIGURING.
GAAAGGHH--!
"ONCE BACK ON EARTH, YOU SPENT SEVERAL MONTHS IN QUARANTINE WAITING TO BE CLEARED INTO THE GENERAL POPULACE. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER THE-- INFECTIOUS NATURE OF THE ALIEN SPORE.
"ACCORDING TO HOSPITAL REPORTS, YOU DIDN'T HAVE A SINGLE VISITOR DURING THIS ENTIRE PERIOD.

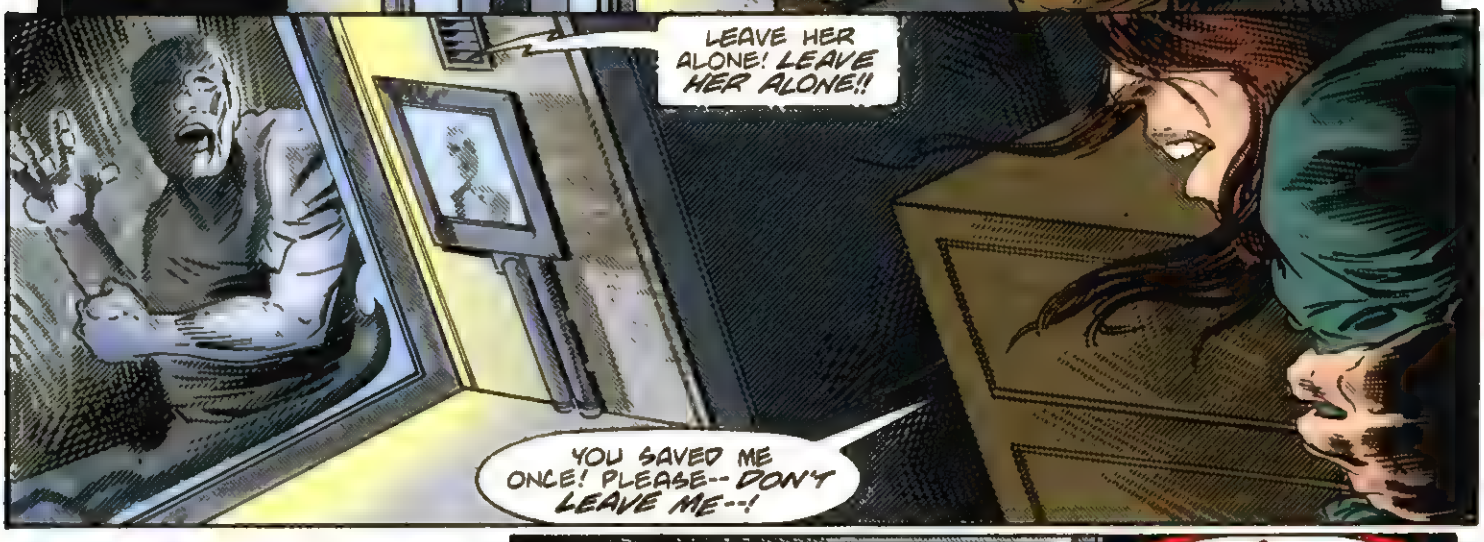
"WHEN YOU WERE FINALLY REINSTATED TO ACTIVE DUTY, THERE SEEM TO HAVE BEEN PROBLEMS IN-- READJUSTING-- TO MILITARY LIFE. FORMER COMRADES, FEARFUL YOU MIGHT SOMEHOW BE 'INFECTIOUS' FROM THE ALIEN BLOOD, AVOIDED CONTACT.
"YOUR LATER RECORD IS PAINFULLY REPETITIVE--DRUNK AND DISORDERLY, BRAWLING, PUBLIC INTOXICATION. REALLY QUITE DISAPPOINTING."
OH GOD, NO-- DON'T TOUCH ME! DON'T TOUCH ME!
I'M A GENETICIST, CORPORAL, BUT IT DOESN'T REQUIRE A PSYCHOLOGIST TO SEE A PATTERN IN THIS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR.
ALL OF IT STEMMING FROM THE RIM MISSION.
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
BEFORE THOSE COAST GUARD FOOLS DESTROYED THEMSELVES, THEY MANAGED TO TRANSMIT THE DATA BANKS FROM THE DERELICT TO OUR GROUND STATION.
WE HAVE THE ENTIRE INBOARD HISTORY, INCLUDING COURSE TRAJECTORIES.
CLICK
YOU SEEK REDEMPTION. I SEEK--
SPECIMENS.

SHE'S DREAMING AGAIN. WHAT DID YOU GIVE HER?
STANDARD THERAPY-- 30 MGS OF TRINOMINE.
IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. THE DREAMS ARE GETTING WORSE.
WE MAY HAVE TO UP THE DOSAGE.
IS THAT WISE? MUCH HIGHER AND YOU RUN THE RISK OF PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE.
IT'S A TRADE-OFF. ISN'T IT?
WHA--?!
BILLIE! WAKE UP! YOU HAVE A VISITOR.

ROOM 4. LOOK, BILLIE, DO YOU WANT ME TO COME IN WITH--
I'LL BE OKAY. THANKS, SASH.
VISITOR
4
YOU HAVE TEN MINUTES. YOU ARE BEING MONITORED.
ANY DISCUSSION OF HOSPITAL THERAPY OR TREATMENTS WILL RESULT IN TERMINATION OF VISITATION AND SUSPENSION OF PRIVILEGES. IS THIS UNDERSTOOD?
YEAH. SURE.
ENJOY YOUR VISIT.
BILLIE-- I...
...I HAD TO SEE YOU.
WILKS--?
THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME, AND YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO REALLY UNDERSTANDS-- I'VE BEEN THINKING-- DREAMING--
THEY FOUND THE HOMEWORLD. I'M GOING OUT, BILLIE. I'M GOING BACK.
YOUR FACE-- THE ALIENS--

TAKE ME WITH YOU.
YOU DON'T MEAN THAT. I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE--
CAN'T YOU SEE? THEY'RE KILLING ME. THE DRUGS AND THE DREAMS-- THEY'RE TAKING MY MIND--
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO YOU?

HEY! LEAVE HER ALONE, DAMMIT!
I DON'T WANT TO DIE HERE! HELP ME, WILKS-- PLEASE!

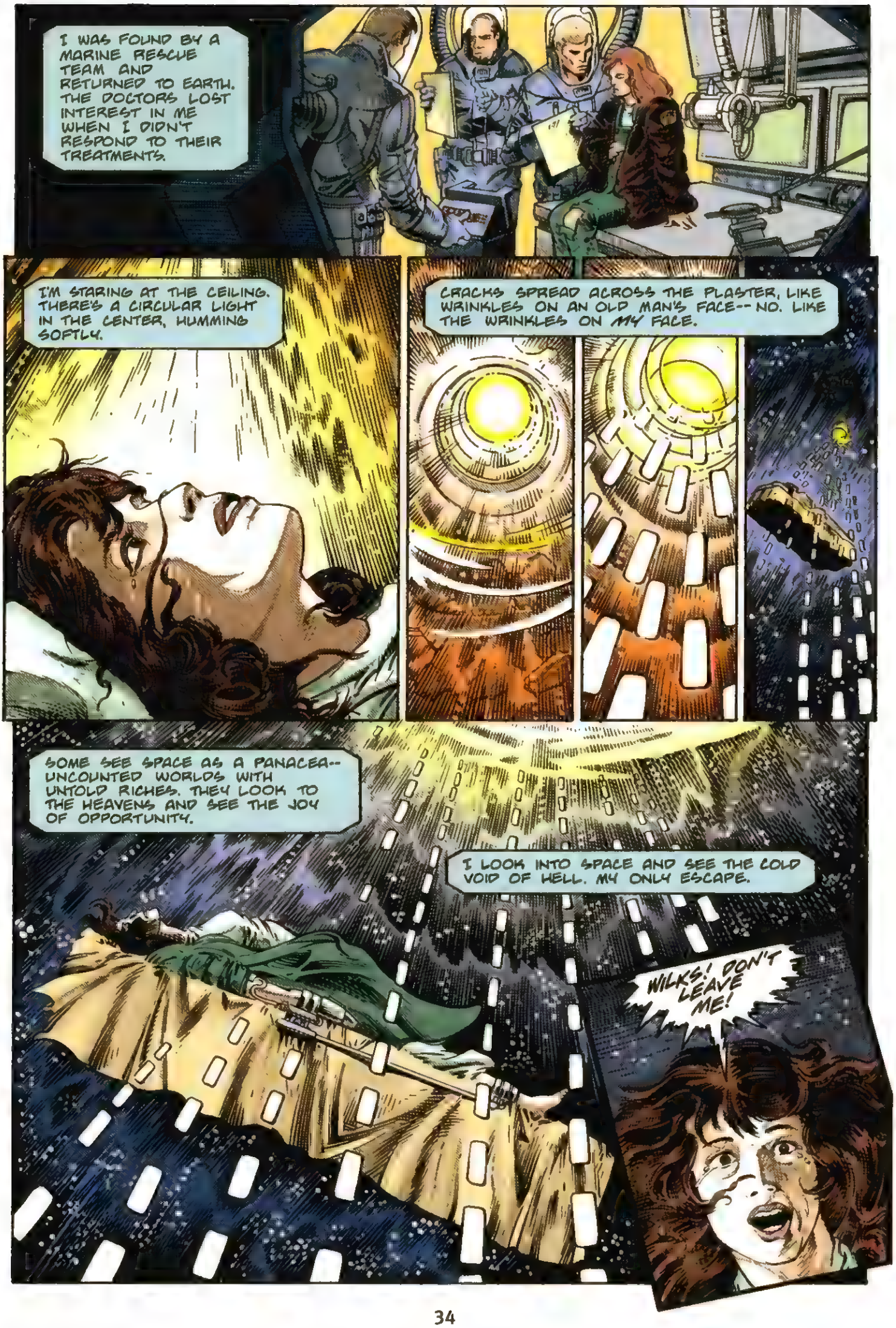

LEAVE HER ALONE! LEAVE HER ALONE!!
YOU SAVED ME ONCE! PLEASE-- DON'T LEAVE ME--!

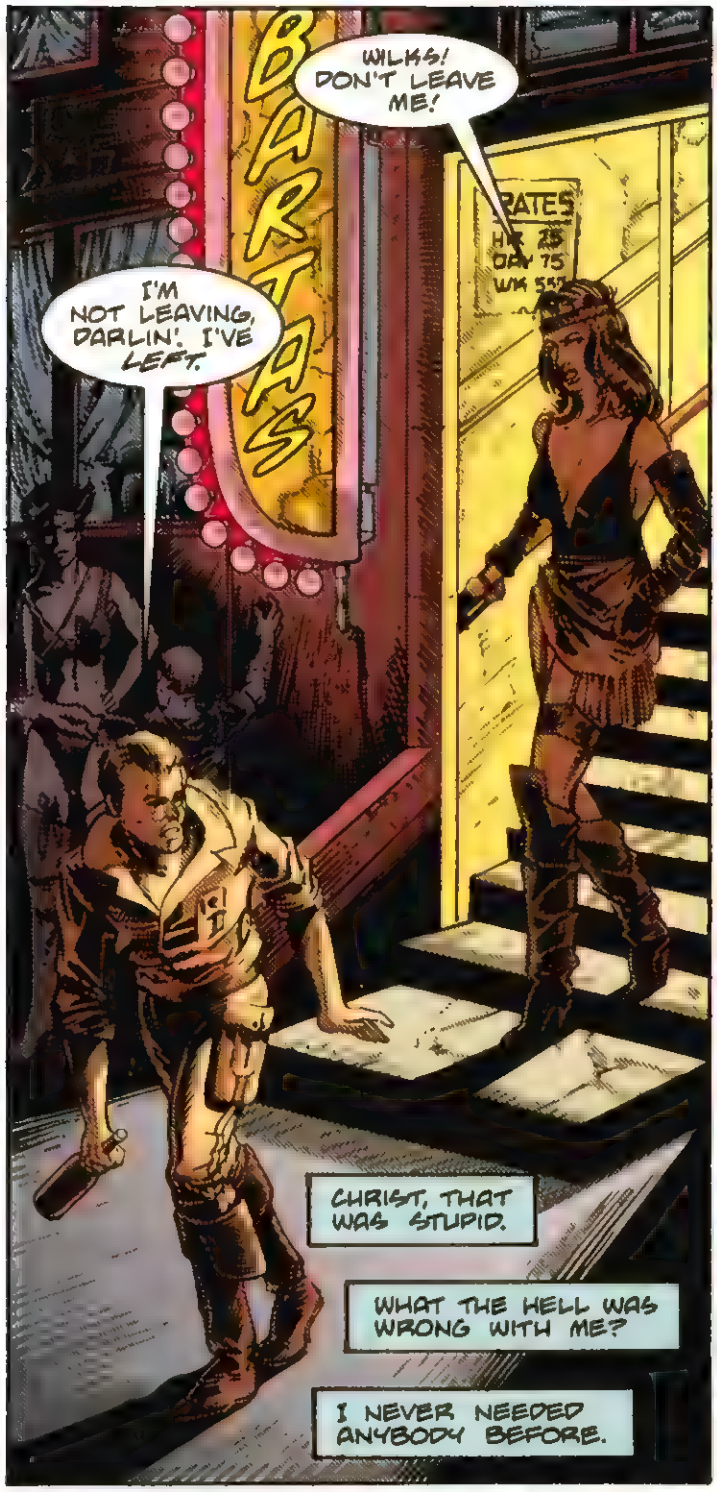
VISITATION PERIOD IS OVER. PLEASE EXIT THROUGH THE REAR DOOR.
BILLIE!!

I'M BLIND!
YOU'RE MY CAPTAIN, BRAVE LITTLE CAPTAIN...
FLY, FLY AWAY, MY BRAVE LITTLE CAPTAIN--
SO SCARED--! PAIN-- CAN'T SEE--!
I...I REMEMBER THAT SONG. MY MOTHER USED TO SING IT WHEN I WAS SMALL--
PAIN'S GOING AWAY. GOD. I FEEL-- WARM NOW.
GET IT OFF-- JEAUS-- JESUS-- CAN'T BREA--
I'M NOT SCARED ANYMORE. I DON'T HAVE TO BE.
SHE'S GOING TO TAKE CARE OF ME.

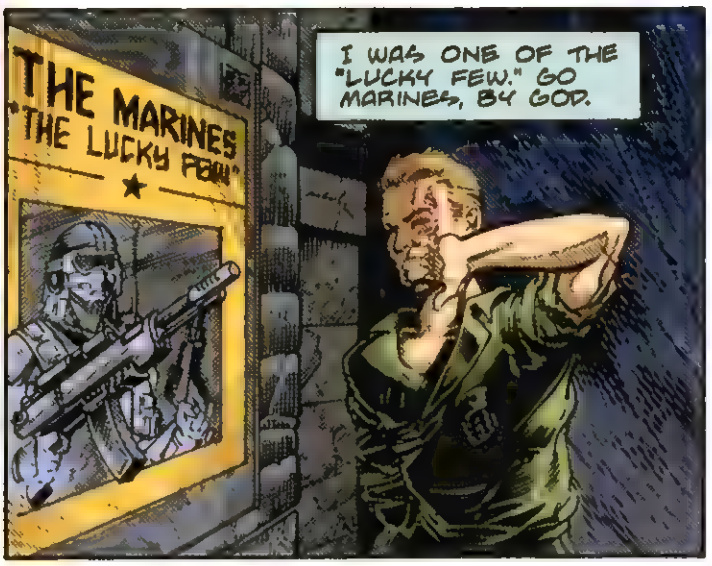
IT'S SO WARM. I'M PART OF SOMETHING NEW AND BETTER. I KEEP REMEMBERING MY MOTHER.
YOU SPEND YOUR LIFE TRYING TO FORGET THE WARMTH OF THE WOMB. BUT THE WORLD'S SO EMPTY, SO COLD--
I SEE IT SO CLEARLY NOW. I WAS HUNGERING FOR THE WARMTH AGAIN, FOR THAT ALMOST *PRETERNATURAL* TOGETHERNESS.
WE PRETEND WITH OUR BODIES, BUT IT ISN'T THE SAME. IT CAN'T BE THE SAME.
CAREER, JOB, HONOR, COUNTRY-- ALL FARCE. WHAT DOES IT ALL *MEAN?*
LIKOWSKI
REALITY IS THE VAST LONELINESS OF OUR SOLITARY, COLD EXISTENCE.
Junket
RGO EXPRESS
I'M BLIND-- BUT I FINALLY *SEE.*

I'M STARING AT THE CEILING. TRANKED AGAIN--THORADIN. I THINK. THE ONE THAT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE SUFFOCATING.
I RELIVE THE PAST AGAIN AND AGAIN. I WAS BORN ON A TERRAFORMER TRANSPORT IN DEEP SPACE. MY PARENTS NAMED ME BILLIE.
OUR NEW HOME WAS A DESOLATE ROCK CHRISTENED RIM. MY PARENTS HAD VOLUNTEERED FOR THE MISSION IN THE ROMANTIC SPIRIT OF THE OLD EARTH PIONEERS, BUT THERE WAS LITTLE ROMANCE ON THAT CRUEL WORLD.
THE WIND AND THE COLD MEANT NOTHING TO THE ALIENS. THEY WAITED, DORMANT, UNTIL THE TIME WAS RIGHT. I WAS THE ONLY SURVIVOR.


I WAS FOUND BY A MARINE RESCUE TEAM AND RETURNED TO EARTH. THE DOCTORS LOST INTEREST IN ME WHEN I DIDN'T RESPOND TO THEIR TREATMENTS.
I'M STARING AT THE CEILING. THERE'S A CIRCULAR LIGHT IN THE CENTER, HUMMING SOFTLY.
CRACKS SPREAD ACROSS THE PLASTER, LIKE WRINKLES ON AN OLD MAN'S FACE-- NO. LIKE THE WRINKLES ON MY FACE.
SOME SEE SPACE AS A PANACEA-- UNCOUNTED WORLDS WITH UNTOLD RICHES. THEY LOOK TO THE HEAVENS AND SEE THE JOY OF OPPORTUNITY.
I LOOK INTO SPACE AND SEE THE COLD VOID OF HELL. MY ONLY ESCAPE.
WILKS! DON'T LEAVE ME!


BARTAS
WILKS! DON'T LEAVE ME!
I'M NOT LEAVING, DARLIN'. I'VE LEFT.
RATES
CHRIST, THAT WAS STUPID.
WHAT THE HELL WAS WRONG WITH ME?
I NEVER NEEDED ANYBODY BEFORE.

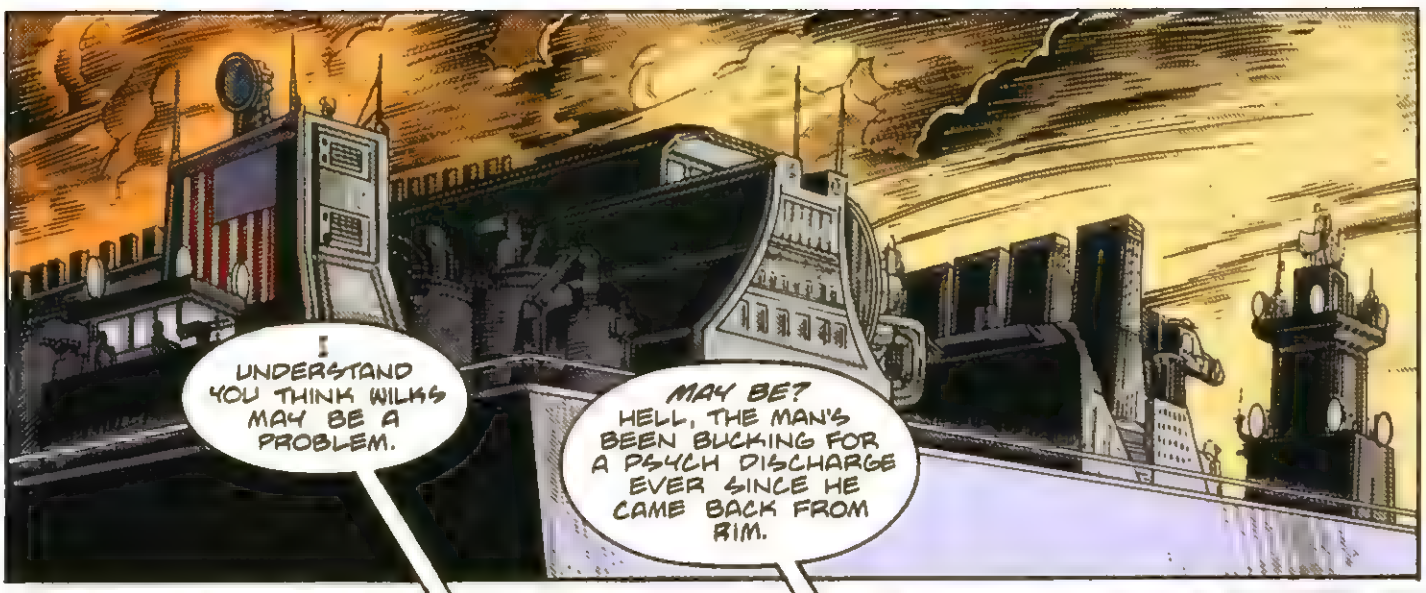
NUBIAN
NICE HAIR.
MUST HAVE BEEN THE BOOZE TALKING.

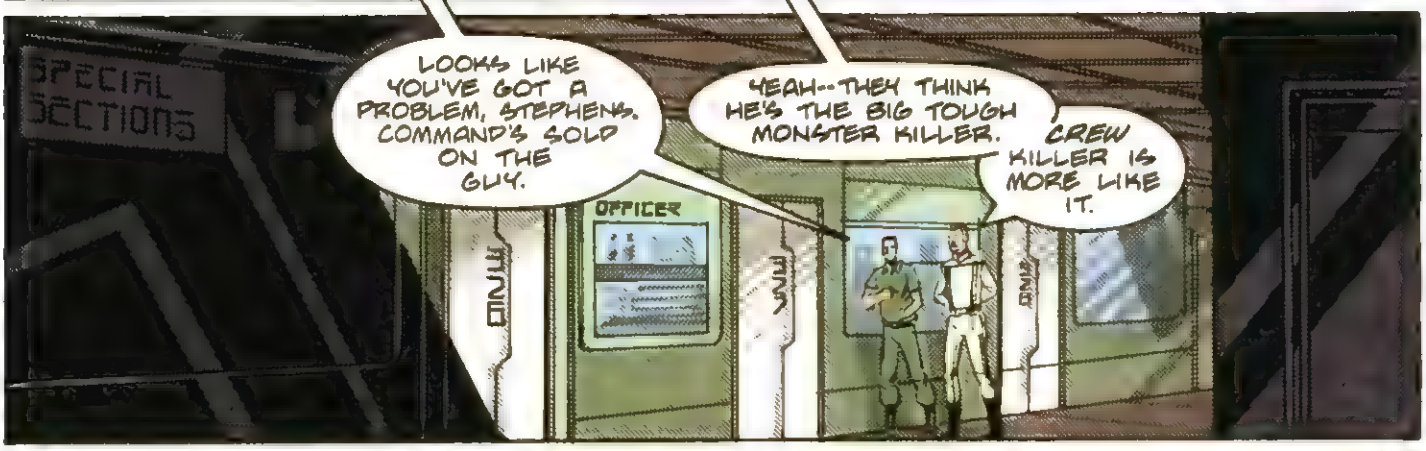

THE MARINES
"THE LUCKY FEW"
I WAS ONE OF THE "LUCKY FEW." GO MARINES, BY GOD.

I KEEP REMEMBERING RIM. DRAKE, VASQUEZ--EVEN THAT ASS, QUINN--THEY WERE OKAY.
OKAY, HELL THEY WERE BUDDIES. AND I LET THEM ALL DIE.

I HAD TO STAY CLEAR, KEEP THE FOCUS. I'D BEEN WAITING FOR MY CHANCE TO GET THOSE ALIEN BASTARDS EVER SINCE I CAME BACK.

I COULDN'T SCREW UP NOW, COULDN'T COMPLICATE IT.
SORRY, BILLIE. I GO.
YOU STAY.

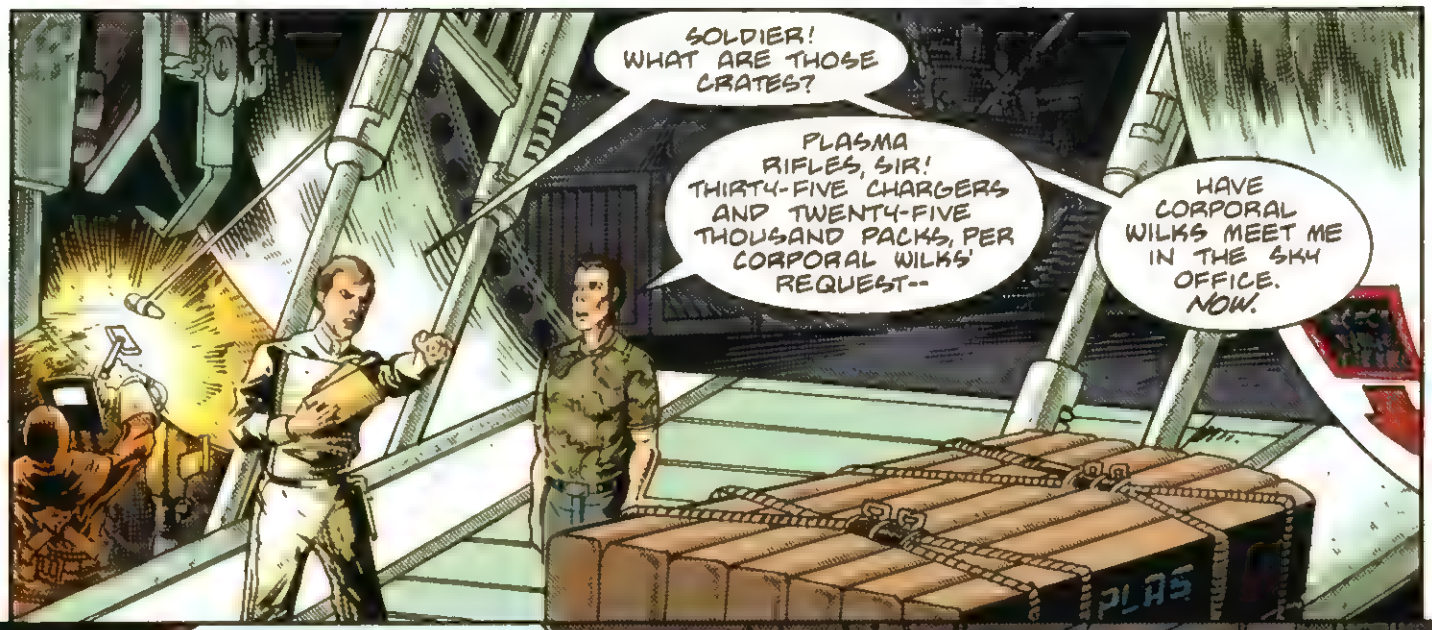

I UNDERSTAND YOU THINK WILKS MAY BE A PROBLEM.
MAY BE? HELL, THE MAN'S BEEN BUCKING FOR A PSYCH DISCHARGE EVER SINCE HE CAME BACK FROM RIM.


SPECIAL SECTIONS
LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM, STEPHENS. COMMAND'S SOLD ON THE GUY.
YEAH--THEY THINK HE'S THE BIG TOUGH MONSTER KILLER.
CREW KILLER IS MORE LIKE IT.
OFFICER

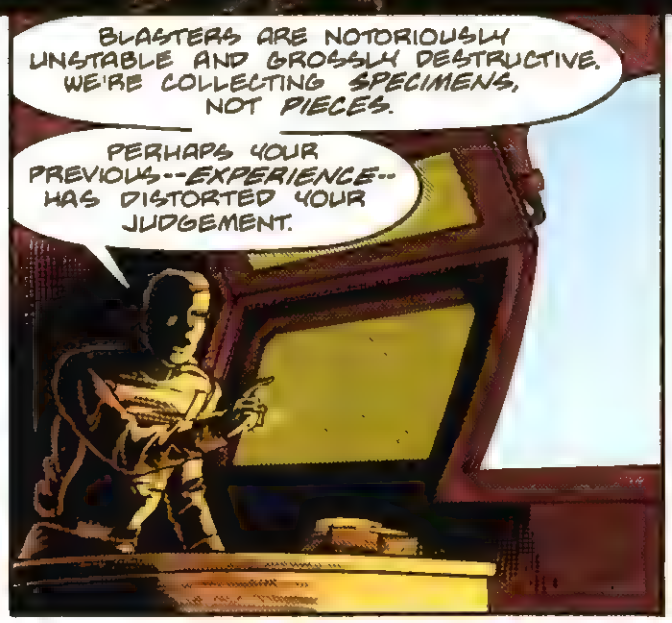
IT'S NOT LIKE THE RIM MISSION WAS A SUCCESS. HELL, THE ONLY SURVIVORS WERE A KID, A CIVILIAN WOMAN, AND WILKS.
THE KID'S A BRAIN CASE AND THE WOMAN--WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT BECAME OF HER.
WHICH MEANS WILKS IS THE ONLY EXPERIENCED HAND AVAILABLE.
COMMAND'S MOVED HIM IN WITH THE GRUNTS, AND HE'S SUPERVISING LOADING OPERATIONS.

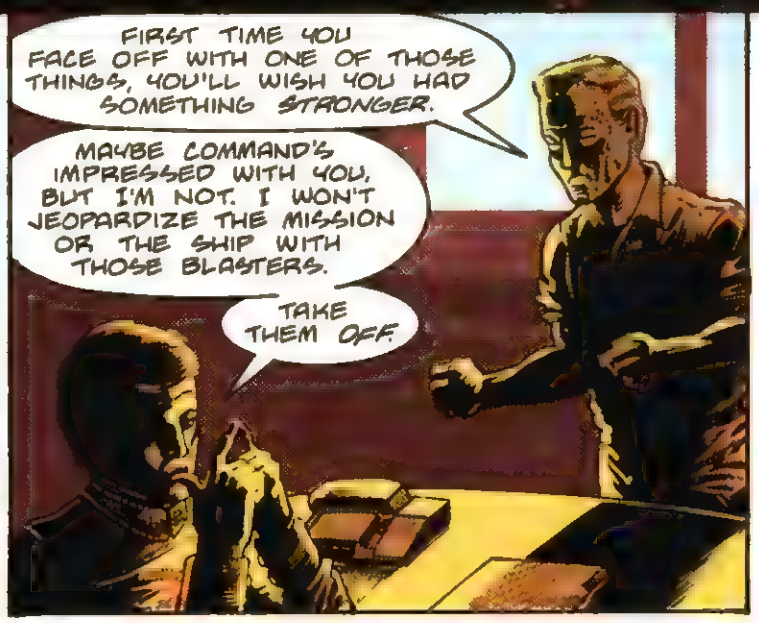
I DON'T NEED HIS KIND OF EXPERIENCE. C'MON, BILL, YOU'VE STILL GOT SOME PULL OVER AT--
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS, STEPHENS? YOU DON'T LIKE WILKS? CROSS HIM OFF YOUR PARTY LIST. BUT HE'S GOT THE EXPERIENCE AND HE'S GOT THE MISSION. UNDERSTOOD?

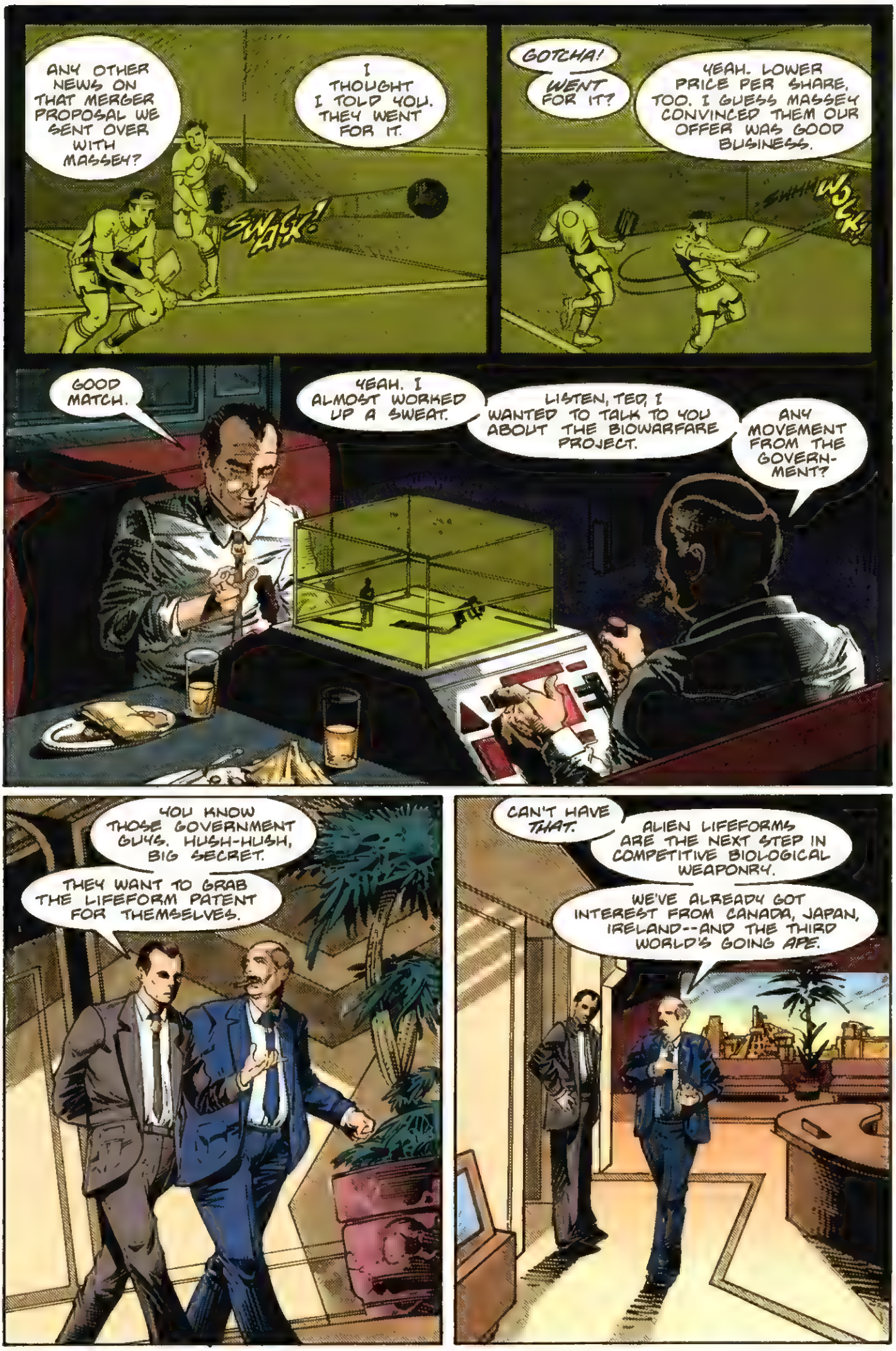
YESSIR. UNDERSTOOD.


SOLDIER! WHAT ARE THOSE CRATES?
PLASMA RIFLES, SIR! THIRTY-FIVE CHARGERS AND TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND PACKS, PER CORPORAL WILKS' REQUEST--
HAVE CORPORAL WILKS MEET ME IN THE SKY OFFICE. NOW.
PLAS

JUST WHO IN THE HELL AUTHORIZED PLASMA WEAPONS, CORPORAL?
I WAS TOLD TO PREPARE THE SHIP-- SIR.


BLASTERS ARE NOTORIOUSLY UNSTABLE AND GROSSLY DESTRUCTIVE. WE'RE COLLECTING SPECIMENS, NOT PIECES.
PERHAPS YOUR PREVIOUS--EXPERIENCE-- HAS DISTORTED YOUR JUDGEMENT.


FIRST TIME YOU FACE OFF WITH ONE OF THOSE THINGS, YOU'LL WISH YOU HAD SOMETHING STRONGER.
MAYBE COMMAND'S IMPRESSED WITH YOU, BUT I'M NOT. I WON'T JEOPARDIZE THE MISSION OR THE SHIP WITH THOSE BLASTERS.
TAKE THEM OFF.


ANY OTHER NEWS ON THAT MERGER PROPOSAL WE SENT OVER WITH MASSEY?
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU. THEY WENT FOR IT.
SWASH!
GOTCHA!
WENT FOR IT?
YEAH. LOWER PRICE PER SHARE, TOO. I GUESS MASSEY CONVINCED THEM OUR OFFER WAS GOOD BUSINESS.
SWHH!
WOCK!
GOOD MATCH.
YEAH. I ALMOST WORKED UP A SWEAT.
LISTEN, TED, I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT THE BIOWARFARE PROJECT.
ANY MOVEMENT FROM THE GOVERN-MENT?
YOU KNOW THOSE GOVERNMENT GUYS. HUSH-HUSH, BIG SECRET.
THEY WANT TO GRAB THE LIFEFORM PATENT FOR THEMSELVES.
CAN'T HAVE THAT.
ALIEN LIFEFORMS ARE THE NEXT STEP IN COMPETITIVE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONRY.
WE'VE ALREADY GOT INTEREST FROM CANADA, JAPAN, IRELAND--AND THE THIRD WORLD'S GOING APE.

I WANT SOMEONE SPECIAL TO LOOK AFTER OUR INTERESTS. MASSEY DID A GOOD JOB ON THE MERGER. TELL ME ABOUT HIM.
PAT-- COFFEE'LL BE READY IN A MINUTE.
DADDY--WHY DO THEY CALL IT "THE WALL STREET JOURNAL"?
MBA FROM HARVARD, DOCTORATE IN LAW FROM CORNELL-- HE COULD HAVE HAD HIS PICK OF THE BIG TWO COMPANIES.
HONEY-- DON'T BE LATE!
INSTEAD HE ENLISTED IN THE MARINES, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.
SILVER STAR FOR BRAVERY DURING THE OIL WAR, COUPLE HUNDRED CONFIRMED KILLS--
GOOD MORNING, MISTER MASSEY!
HE DIDN'T ENLIST OUT OF PATRIOTISM. HE LIKED IT.
HE HAD MORE DECORATIONS THAN A CHRISTMAS TREE, THEN SUDDENLY, HE WAS COURT MARTIALED.
SEEMS HE TRIED TO KILL HIS COMMANDING OFFICER FOR FAILING TO ORDER HIS SQUAD TO ATTACK A CIVILIAN ENCAMPMENT.
WE PAID OFF THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL AND HIRED HIM IMMEDIATELY. IT'S RARE WHEN YOU FIND A MAN WHO LOVES HIS WORK.

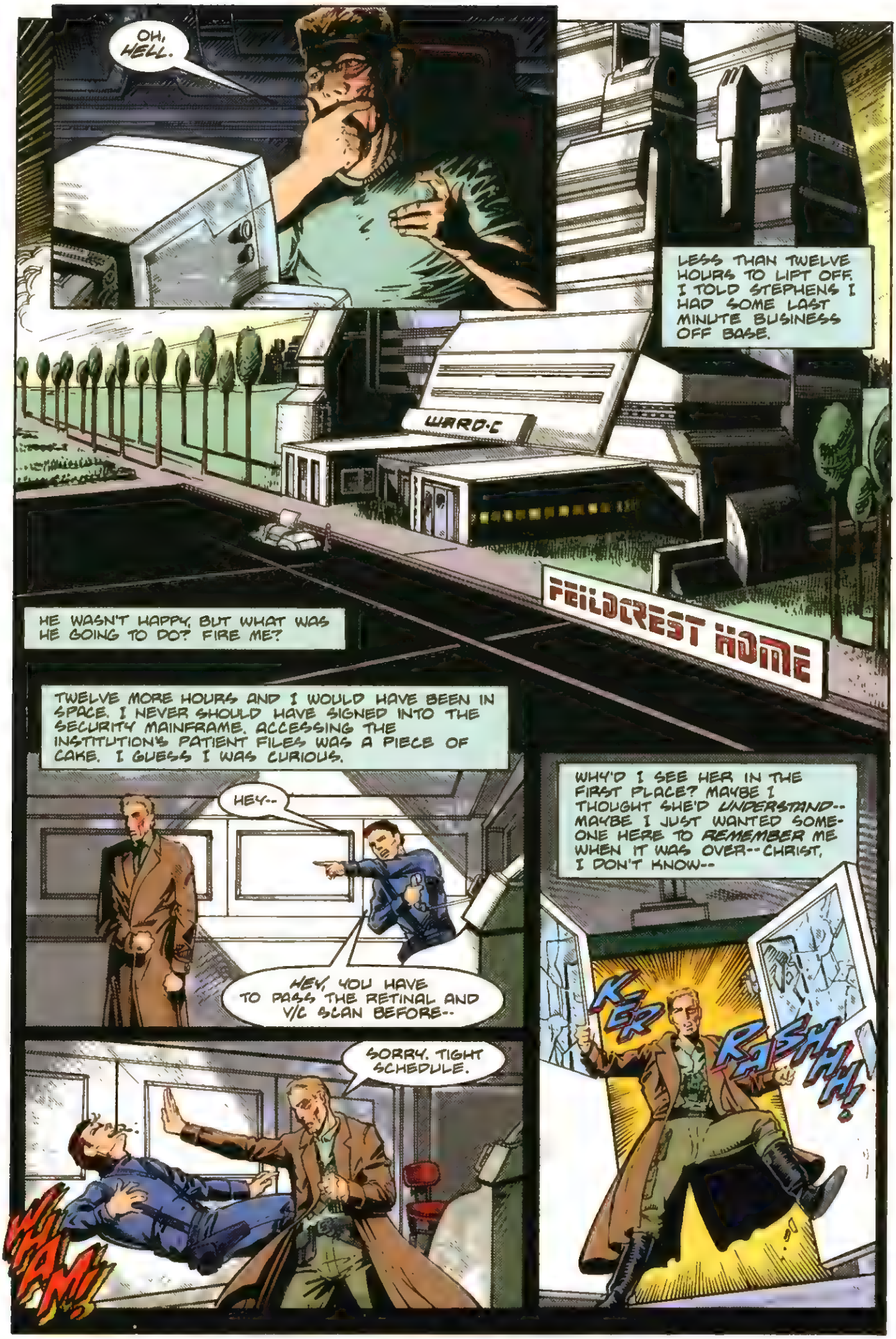
THE DARKNESS IS A BLANKET.
SOMETHING DRIPS LIKE SWEAT, ALL WARM AND STICKY.
IT FEELS GOOD.
FLY, FLY AWAY, MY BRAVE LITTLE CAPTAIN--
WE WERE ONE. GOD, I LOVED YOU.
THEN I WAS TORN FROM YOU, FORCED INTO THIS NAKED EXISTENCE, SO ALONE AND COLD I NEVER THOUGHT I'D FEEL THAT LOVE AGAIN.
MY TRUE MOTHER IS PART OF ME. I CAN FEEL HER, SLIDING WET IN MY THROAT, FILLING MY LUNGS AND MY STOMACH, WRAPPING HER FINGERS INSIDE SO WARM, SO WARM--
HER TEETH GLITTER LIKE THE STARS. GOD. SHE IS IMPOSSIBLY BEAUTIFUL.
SHE LOVES ME MORE THAN YOU EVER COULD.

EASLEY! TRY TO CIRCLE BEHIND THE BUNKER AND FIND A SERVICE PORT! WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BLAST THROUGH IT.
ROGER THAT. COVER ME!
I'VE ZEROED THE AFT PLATE. I'M GOING IN ON THREE.
COPY.
ONE-- TWO--
KAWHAM!
YEAH! DEAD ON, BUDDY! WE MUST HAVE CUT THE MAIN LINE!
ZZZT!
YEAH, DEAD ON, "BUDDY."
AIGGGH!

DAMN. CORPORAL WILKS.
GET YOUR ASS OUT OF THE MUD BEFORE YOU SHORT THE WHOLE SUIT.
BUELLER AND EASLEY WERE STUPID. YOU DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING IN COMBAT.
YEAH, THEY TOOK OUT THE REMOTES AND THE TARGETING SYSTEM, AND THEY'RE STILL DEAD.
CLEAR TO YOU, BLAKE?
A REAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE.
I CAN SEE YOU'RE MOVED. IN HONOR OF BUELLER'S DEATH, WE'RE GOING TO SPEND THE REST OF THE DAY ON THE COURSE. MAYBE SOME OF THIS WILL SINK IN.
OH, JEZUZ--
THANKS A LOT, BUELLER.

I WAS IMPRESSED. EVERYONE ON THE SQUAD WAS TOP RATED IN ORDINANCE--BLINDERS, PROJECTORS, LOW-LEVEL NEUTRON STUFF, AND ALL THE CONVENTIONALS. DOC ORONA HAD PUT SOME THOUGHT INTO THIS.
C'MON, BLAKE, GET IT UP AND OVER--!
THEY'D BEEN WORKING AS A UNIT SINCE INCEPTION. JUST OVER A YEAR. IT SHOWED.
POOM!
BRRRAACKKK!
FUNNY HOW MUCH THEY REMINDED ME OF THE RIM TEAM.
MOVE IT!
I KEPT THINKING ABOUT RIM, REMEMBERING WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE PART OF A TEAM, TO HAVE FRIENDS WHO WOULD DIE FOR YOU, FRIENDS WHO--
--NO! FORGET RIM. MY FRIENDS ARE DEAD. REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AFTER-- THE PAIN, THE LONELINESS. THIS WASN'T ABOUT DUTY, HONOR, LOYALTY-- THIS WAS FOR ME AND NO ONE ELSE.

THANK YOU, OFFICER. PLEASE HAVE A SEAT, WILHEMINA.
MY NAME'S BILLIE.
WE'VE BEEN DISCUSSING YOUR PROBLEM, BILLIE. DOCTOR HANNAH FEELS SURGERY IS REALLY OUR ONLY ALTERNATIVE.
SINCE YOU'RE A MINOR WITH NO NEXT OF KIN, WE REALLY DON'T NEED ANYONE'S PERMISSION TO GO AHEAD, BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT YOU UNDERSTAND WHY--
I-- I'LL BE GOOD.
I'LL TRY HARDER AND--
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS BEFORE, BILLIE. TRYING ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH ANYMORE.
YOU HAVE FORCED US TO TAKE DRASTIC MEASURES.
--BURN THE TISSUE--
--REALLY QUITE PAINLESS--
IT'S REALLY A MINOR OPERATION.
WE TARGET THE SPECIFIC AREAS IN THE BRAIN RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR-- PROBLEMS, AND USE A LASER SCALPEL TO SEVER THE--
--WON'T FEEL A THING--
--EVER AGAIN--


OH, HELL.
LESS THAN TWELVE HOURS TO LIFT OFF. I TOLD STEPHENS I HAD SOME LAST MINUTE BUSINESS OFF BASE.
WARD-C
FIELDCREST HOME
HE WASN'T HAPPY, BUT WHAT WAS HE GOING TO DO? FIRE ME?
TWELVE MORE HOURS AND I WOULD HAVE BEEN IN SPACE. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE SIGNED INTO THE SECURITY MAINFRAME. ACCESSING THE INSTITUTION'S PATIENT FILES WAS A PIECE OF CAKE. I GUESS I WAS CURIOUS.
HEY--
HEY, YOU HAVE TO PASS THE RETINAL AND V/C SCAN BEFORE--
SORRY. TIGHT SCHEDULE.
WHAM!
WHY'D I SEE HER IN THE FIRST PLACE? MAYBE I THOUGHT SHE'D UNDERSTAND-- MAYBE I JUST WANTED SOMEONE HERE TO REMEMBER ME WHEN IT WAS OVER--CHRIST, I DON'T KNOW--
KER
RASH!

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN LIVING AND DYING MEANT SOMETHING TO ME.
CALL SECURITY! CALL--

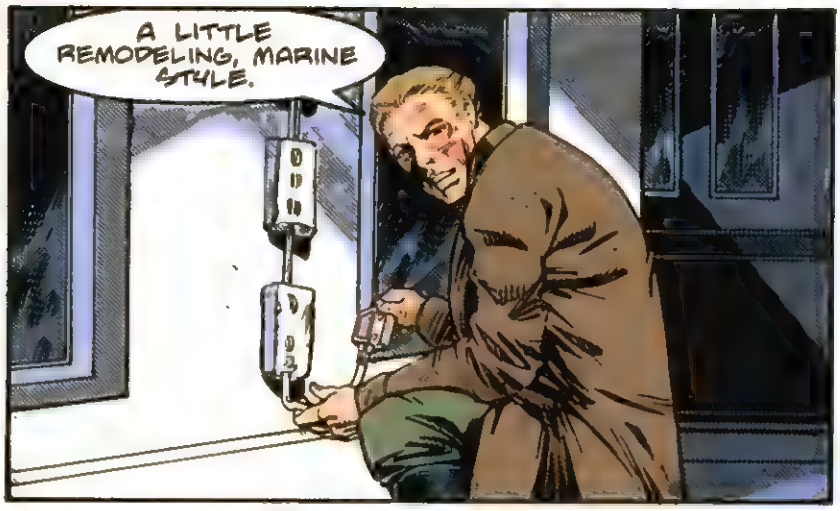
MY OLD SQUAD-- QUINN, VASQUEZ AND THE REST-- FACED HELL ITSELF TO RESCUE A SCARED LITTLE GIRL.
SEE MY FACE? SCARY, ISN'T IT? WHERE'S BILLIE?
ROOM 4017--BUT YOU--
OH, AND YOU CAN FORGET ABOUT OUTSIDE SECURITY. I DISCONNECTED THE DOWNLINK ABOUT AN HOUR AGO.

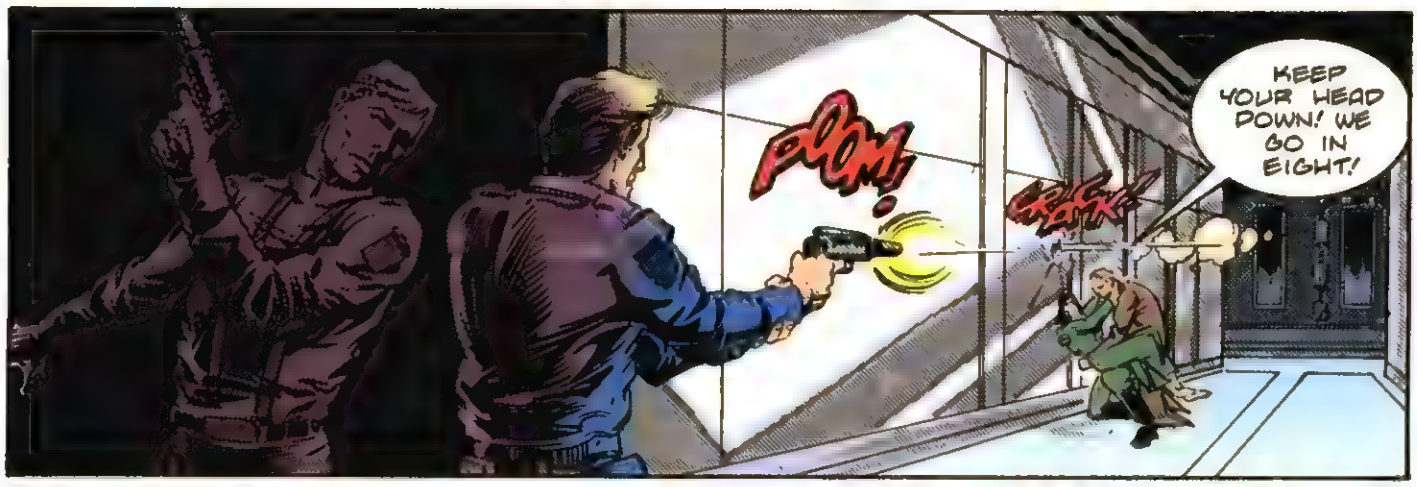
NOW THEY WANTED TO DESTROY HER. JESUS, MY FRIENDS DIED TO SAVE HER.
NICE TRY, QUICK-DRAW.
UGHHH--!
SSSZZZASSSKK!
BILLIE WAS THE ONLY THING LEFT OF THEM.

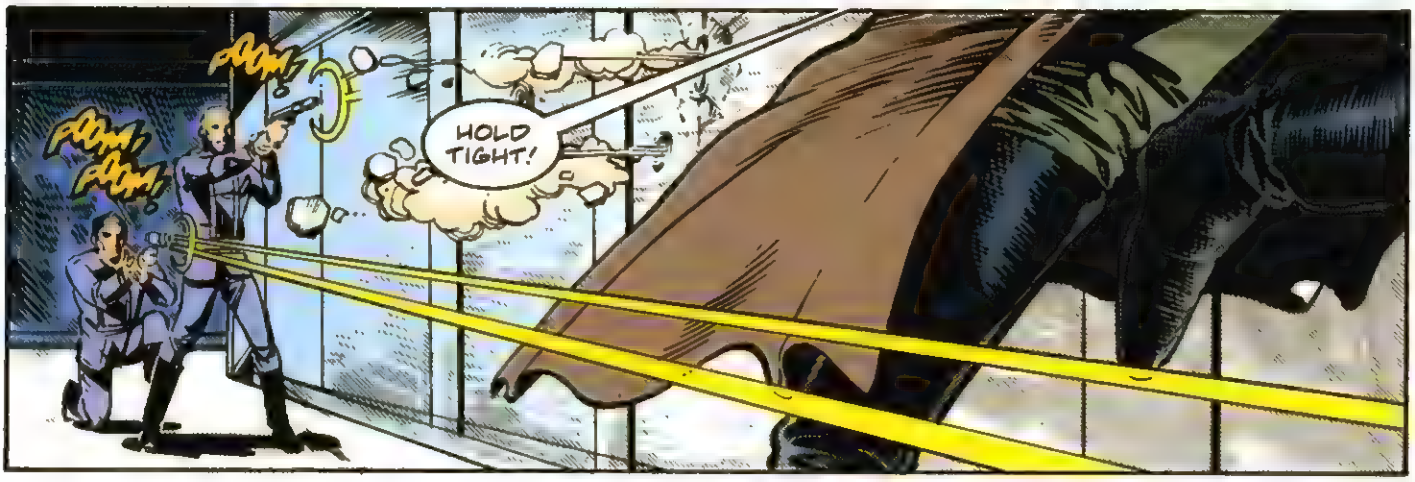
DROP YOUR SOCKS, KID. WE'RE GOING FOR A RIDE.

BILLIE'S ROOM WAS ON THE FORTIETH FLOOR OF THE MEDICAL HIGHRISE. EVEN WITH THE AUTOMATIC SECURITY SYSTEM BLINKED, THEY'D HAVE THE GROUND EXITS COVERED BY NOW.
DAMN, KID, YOU LOOK LIKE SHIT.
LOOK... WHO'S TALKING.. *CUF* *CUF*..

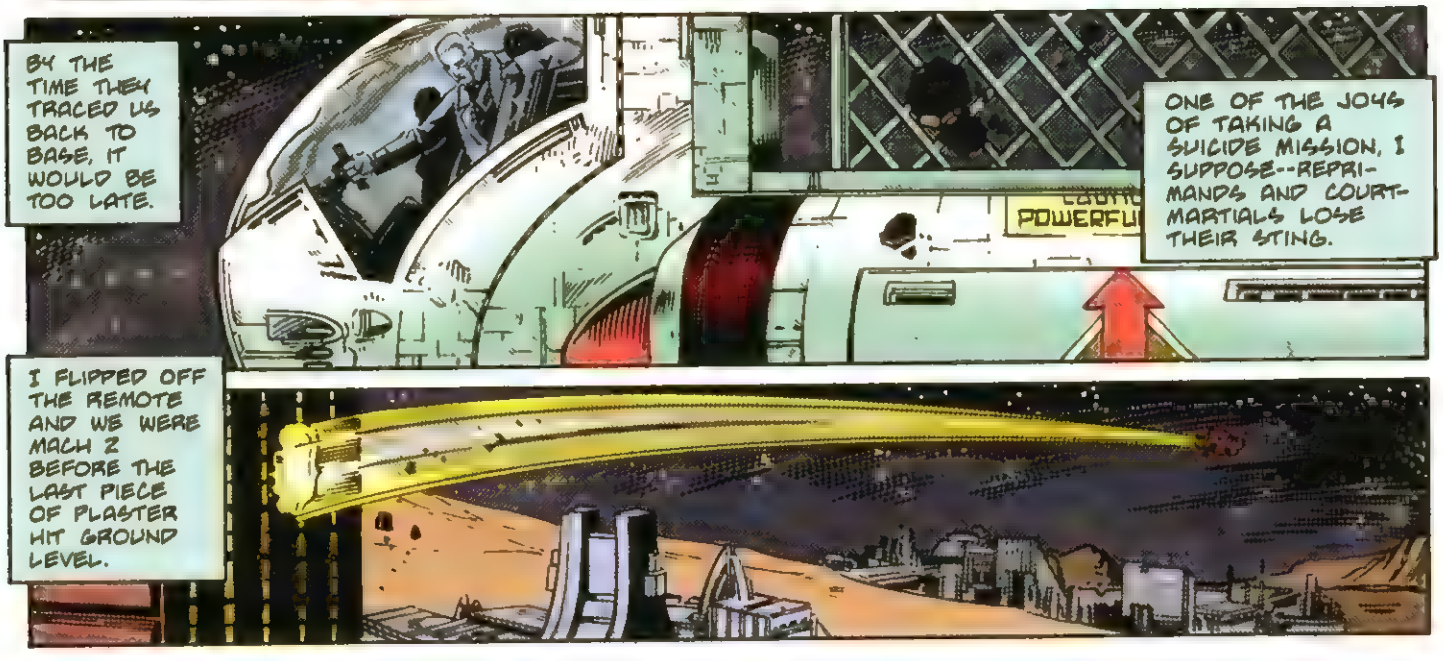
WHA-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING--?


A LITTLE REMODELING, MARINE STYLE.


PLOM!
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN! WE GO IN EIGHT!


PLOM!
PLOM! PLOM!
HOLD TIGHT!

THE WALL BLEW OUT FROM THE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION AND WE WENT ALONG WITH IT. NICE VIEW.
BOOM
THE JET RESCUE TECHNOLOGY HAD BEEN DEVELOPED AFTER THE WORLD TRADE CENTER SMOKED IN '24. I'D 'BORROWED' THE SHIP AND THE HAND-HELD CONTROLLER FROM CIVILIAN OPERATIONS.
CAUTION: POWERFUL DRAFT
THE SHIP HAD BEEN DESIGNED FOR HIGH-RISE FIRE RESCUE, BUT I REMEMBER WHAT SERGEANT APONE USED TO SAY: "MARINES DON'T QUIT. THEY ADAPT."


BY THE TIME THEY TRACED US BACK TO BASE, IT WOULD BE TOO LATE.
ONE OF THE JOYS OF TAKING A SUICIDE MISSION, I SUPPOSE--REPRIMANDS AND COURT-MARTIALS LOSE THEIR STING.
I FLIPPED OFF THE REMOTE AND WE WERE MACH 2 BEFORE THE LAST PIECE OF PLASTER HIT GROUND LEVEL.

FOR YEARS, THE GENERAL PUBLIC HAD BEEN FED THIS IMAGE OF MARINES AS "INTELLECTUAL WARRIORS"--COLLEGE DIPLOMA IN ONE HAND, M-90 RAPID FIRE IN THE OTHER.

I GUESS IT'S MORE COMFORTING TO IMAGINE THE NATIONAL DEFENSE SYSTEM IN THE HANDS OF A STIFF-EYED, EMOTIONLESS MARTINET THAN SOME SCARED TEENAGER WITH A SKIN PROBLEM.

CORPORAL WILKS! IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG?

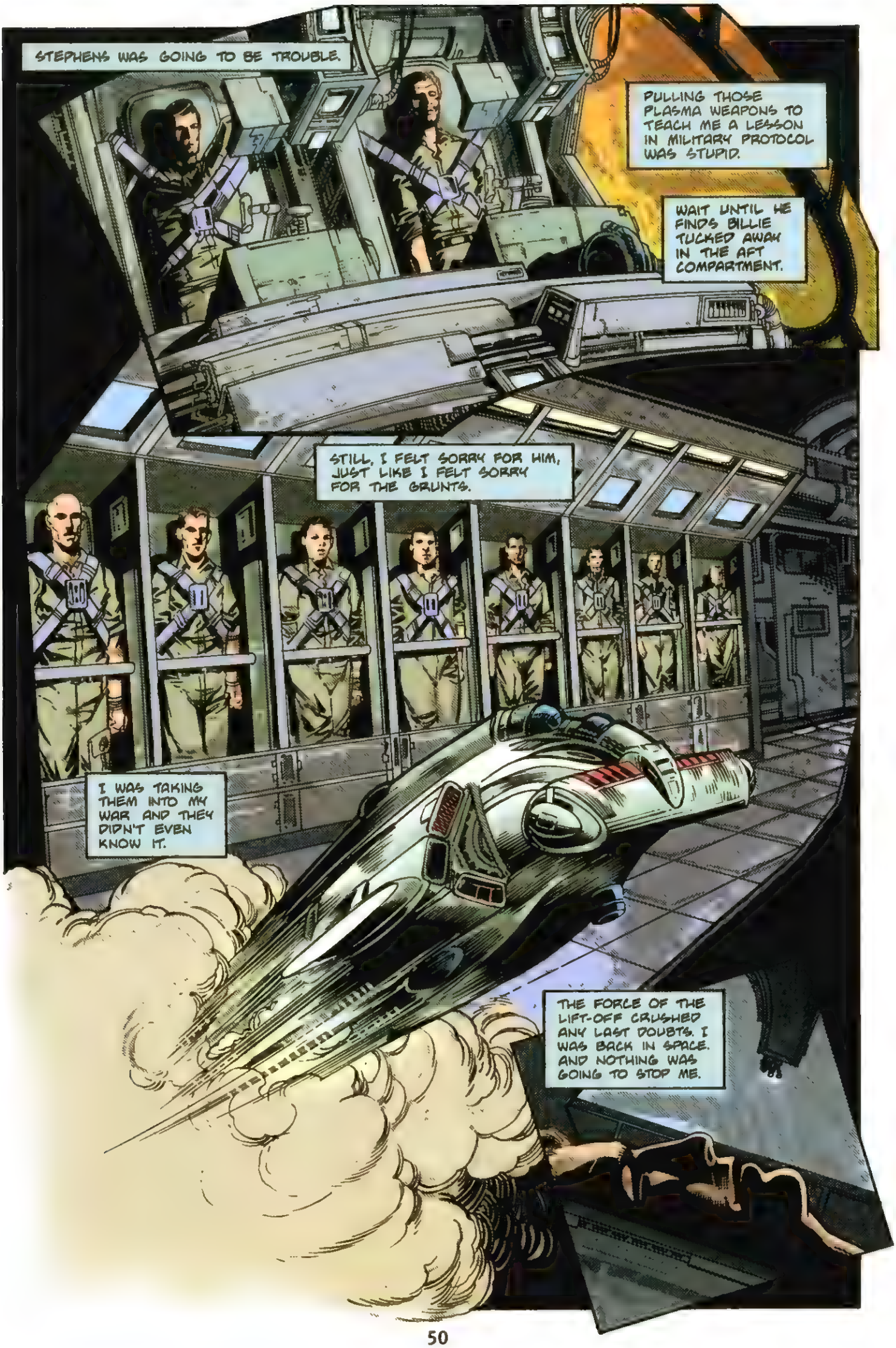
YEAH, THE DODGERS ARE STILL IN LOS ANGELES. AT EASE, SON.

AFTER A WHILE, THE MARINES *THEMSELVES* BOUGHT THE MYTH. BIG MISTAKE. SOLDIERS HAVE THE SAME WANTS AND DESIRES AS EVERYONE ELSE. SOMETIMES THEY DO THINGS NOT BECAUSE IT'S RIGHT OR WRONG, BUT BECAUSE THEY *MUST*.

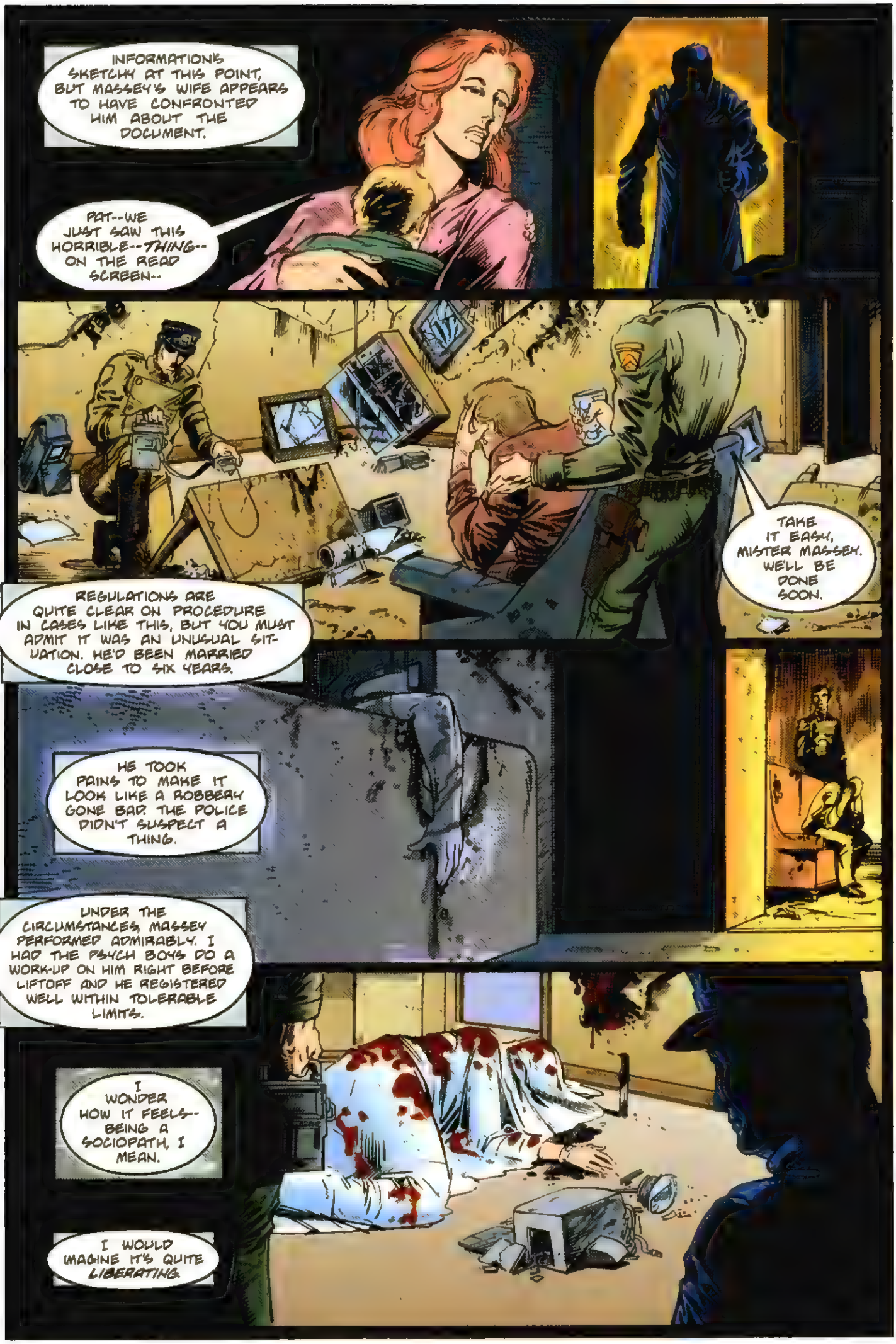
WE'RE GOING BACK, AREN'T WE? WE'RE *REALLY* GOING BACK!

FOR INSTANCE, NOBODY EXPECTS A MARINE CORPORAL TO SMUGGLE AN UNAUTHORIZED PASSENGER ABOARD A TOP-SECURITY MILITARY FLIGHT.

MAYBE THAT'S WHY IT WAS SO DAMN *EASY*.


STEPHENS WAS GOING TO BE TROUBLE.
PULLING THOSE PLASMA WEAPONS TO TEACH ME A LESSON IN MILITARY PROTOCOL WAS STUPID.
WAIT UNTIL HE FINDS BILLIE TUCKED AWAY IN THE AFT COMPARTMENT.
STILL, I FELT SORRY FOR HIM, JUST LIKE I FELT SORRY FOR THE GRUNTS.
I WAS TAKING THEM INTO MY WAR AND THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT.
THE FORCE OF THE LIFT-OFF CRUSHED ANY LAST DOUBTS. I WAS BACK IN SPACE. AND NOTHING WAS GOING TO STOP ME.

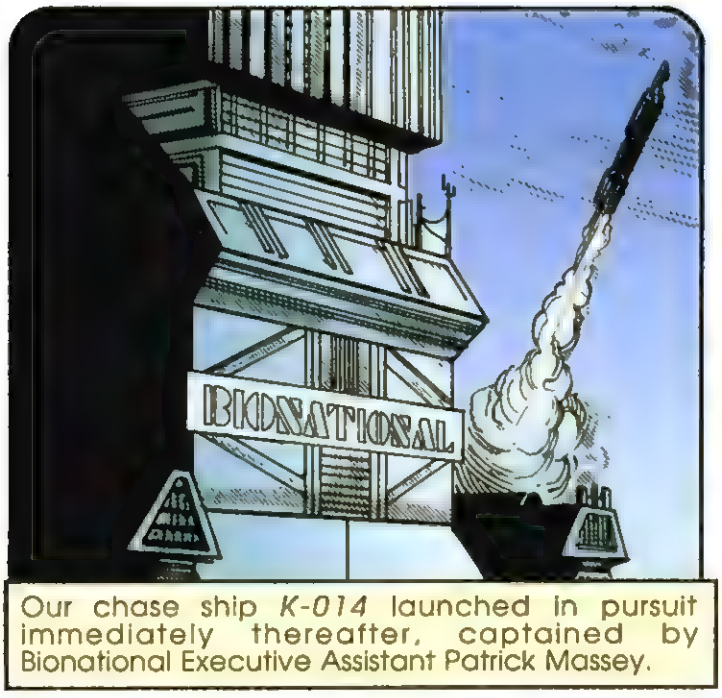
GREAT SHOW! I HAVEN'T HEARD INDUSTRIAL NOISE LIKE THAT SINCE COLLEGE!
WE DESERVE A LITTLE REL TIME. IT'S BEEN HELL AND A HALF SINCE WE STARTED PLANNING THE INTERCEPT MISSION.
1990's HOLOGRAM SHOW
DAVID BYRNE
EINSTUERZENDE NEUBAUTEN
TICKETS
ADMISSION
ADULT 100
CHILD 50
RIGHT NOW EVERYTHING LOOKS GOOD, BUT I'M STILL A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT THAT LAST-MINUTE BUSINESS WITH MASSEY.
IT WAS A DAMNED STUPID MISTAKE.
TOP SECRET
EYES ONLY
APPARENTLY ONE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS PEOPLE SENT MASSEY SOME CLASSIFIED MAIL THROUGH AN UNCLASSIFIED CHANNEL.
UNFORUNATELY, MASSEY'S SON ACCESSED THE MATERIAL.
HEY, MOM! LOOK AT THIS!
OH MY GOD.
VERY CARELESS.

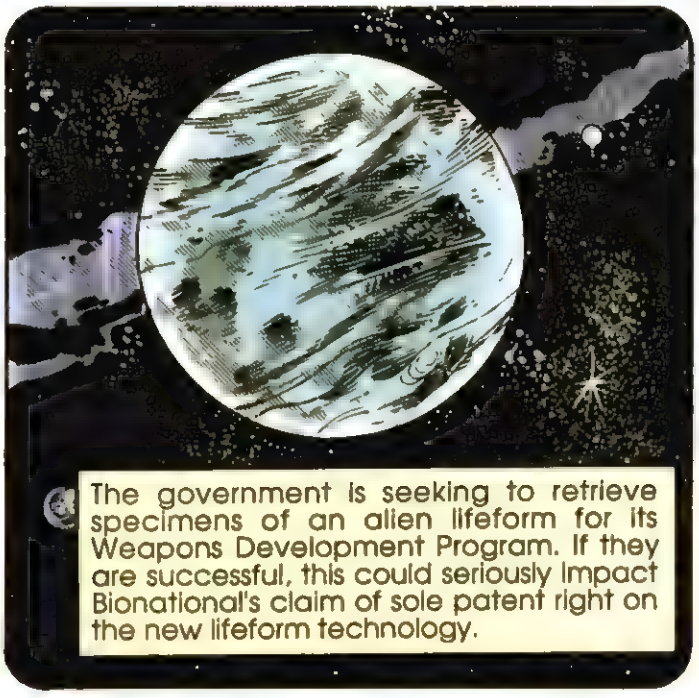

INFORMATION'S SKETCHY AT THIS POINT, BUT MASSEY'S WIFE APPEARS TO HAVE CONFRONTED HIM ABOUT THE DOCUMENT.
PAT--WE JUST SAW THIS HORRIBLE--THING--ON THE READ SCREEN--
TAKE IT EASY, MISTER MASSEY. WE'LL BE DONE SOON.
REGULATIONS ARE QUITE CLEAR ON PROCEDURE IN CASES LIKE THIS, BUT YOU MUST ADMIT IT WAS AN UNUSUAL SITUATION. HE'D BEEN MARRIED CLOSE TO SIX YEARS.
HE TOOK PAINS TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE A ROBBERY GONE BAD. THE POLICE DIDN'T SUSPECT A THING.
UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, MASSEY PERFORMED ADMIRABLY. I HAD THE PSYCH BOYS DO A WORK-UP ON HIM RIGHT BEFORE LIFTOFF AND HE REGISTERED WELL WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS.
I WONDER HOW IT FEELS--BEING A SOCIOPATH, I MEAN.
I WOULD IMAGINE IT'S QUITE LIBERATING.

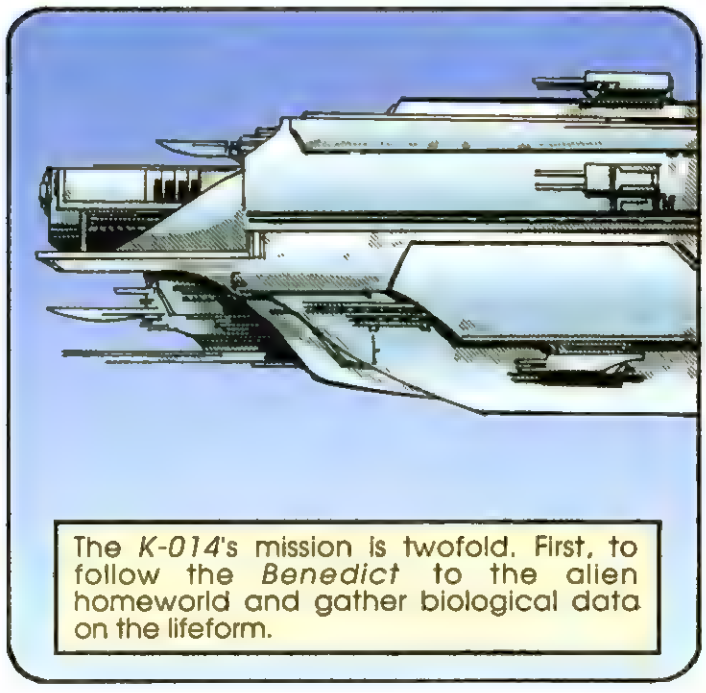
EYES ONLY
DATA LOCK

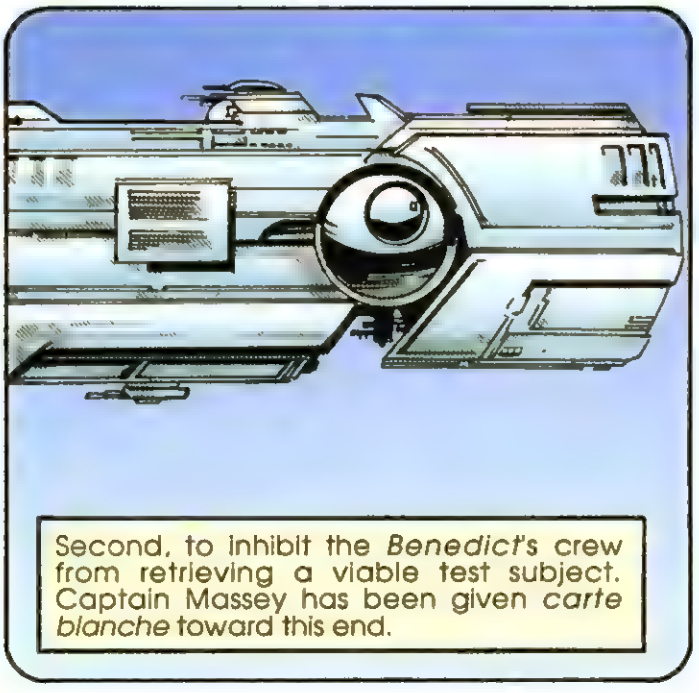
BIONATIONAL
INTERNAL
MEMORANDUM

OPERATION:
OUTREACH







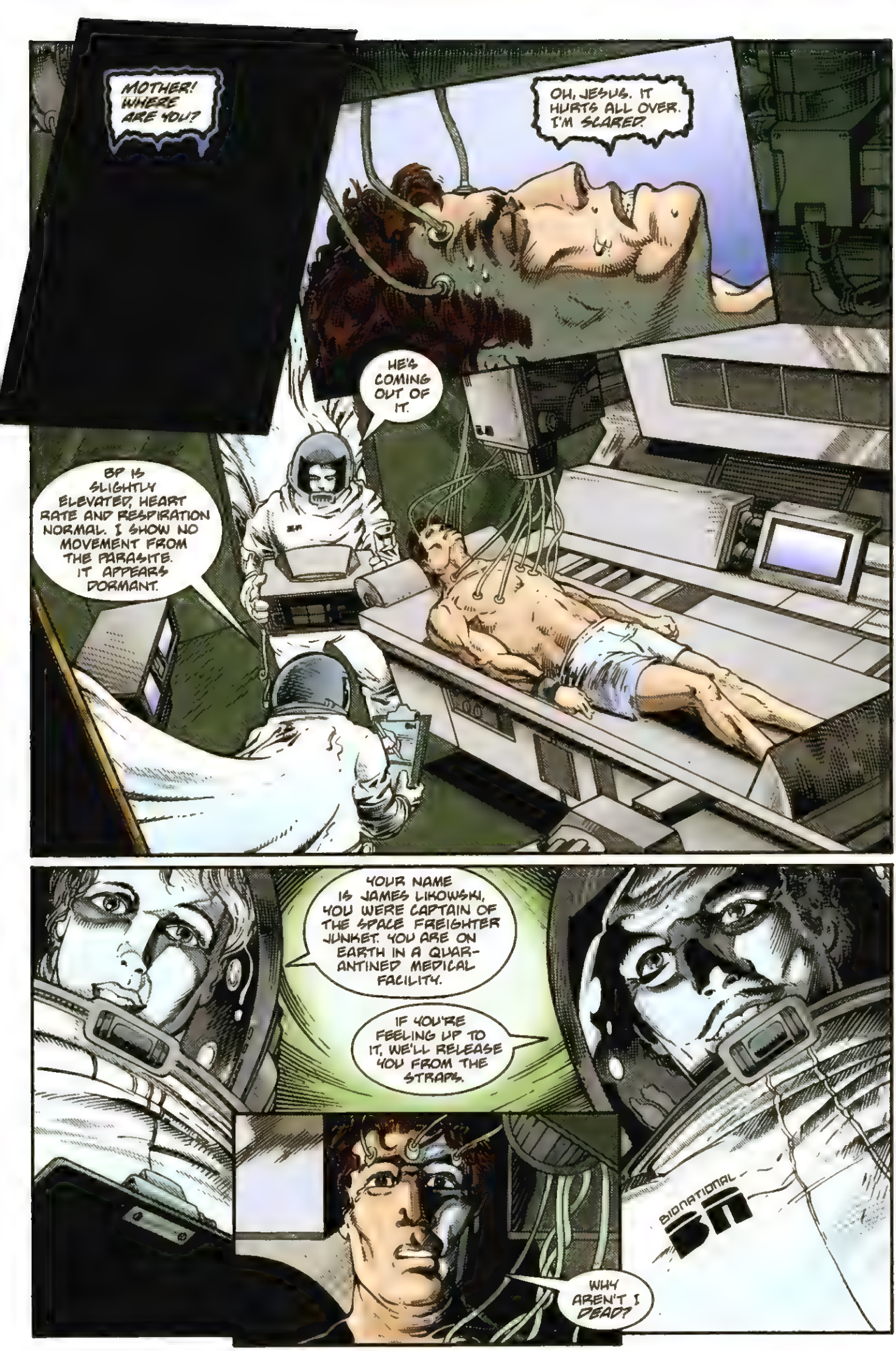


In the interim, our Bionational research team continues its examination of the human specimen salvaged from the ejected pilot's pod of the cargo vessel *Junket*.
SOMEONE'S OUT THERE, MOTHER.
CARGO EXPRESS
IDENTIFICATION
VALID FOR TYPE 5
8225-7083-1
NON-TRANSFERABLE
JAMES LIKOWSKI···SECTION 10-B611
PILOT···CLASSIFICATION 2-S
Human specimen's pod had been damaged, causing loss of atmosphere, but vital signs were somehow *preserved* by the infusion of the alien lifeform.
After retrieval, both specimens were brought to Bionational's Houston labs for analysis.
SOMETHING TOUCHES ME, MOTHER. I CAN FEEL IT IN MY ARMS, MY CHEST--
Preliminary reports from our weapons specialists are encouraging. Full-scale testing should commence within the next 48 hours. We shall provide daily updates for all members of the Bionational board.
LIKOWSKI
HEART & LUNGS
PROTECT ME, MOTHER. DON'T LET THEM HURT ME--
--PLEASE.

Dr. Ranier: Start wherever you'd like.
Patient Gonzales: Okay. Okay. **(pause)** I'm with my mother. We're still in L.A.—
Dr. Ranier: Your mother died several years ago?
Patient Gonzales: Cancer. **(pause)** We're taking the Wilshire tube into downtown L.A. Right then I knew I was dreaming...I've *never* seen an empty tube.
Patient Gonzales: All of a sudden, we hear this loud—*scraping* sound—
Dr. Ranier: Scraping? How do you mean?
Patient Gonzales: Like...like fingernails ripping fabric. **(pause)** Then, suddenly, the car *stops*—
Patient Gonzales: Something was trying to...*get in*. I pounded on the door, hoping someone would hear us—
Patient Gonzales: Then these—*things* started to—*claw* into the car. I ran to my mother and she made this sick, *bubbling* sound, deep in her chest—
Patient Gonzales: It was just a stupid nightmare, right? *Right?*

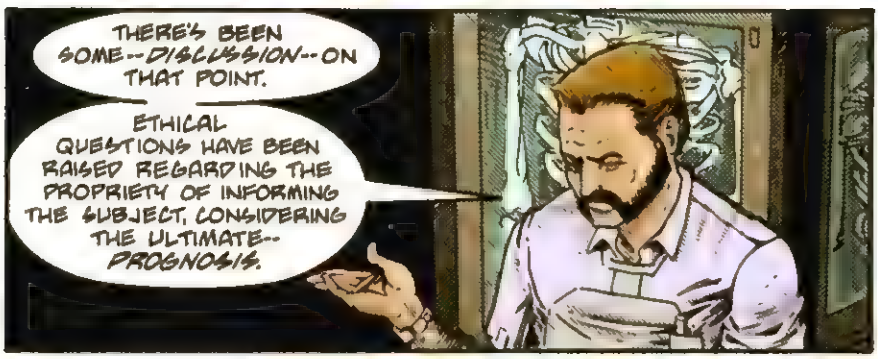
Dr. Morgan: What happened after the television came on?
Patient Culp: First, there was only distortion—but then something started to—
Patient Culp: — come at me, from inside the screen —
Patient Duncan: I must have dosed off. The next thing I knew, the stewardess was standing next to me. I remember thinking that she reminded me of someone...
Dr. Frankel: Who?
Patient Duncan: (pause) It's going to sound funny, but—my mother.
Patient Duncan: All at once, these teeth—they...it ripped right through her chest—like it had been inside her the whole time —
Patient Lockwood: I kept screaming for my Mommy, but she wasn't there. Just the monster—coming closer and closer —

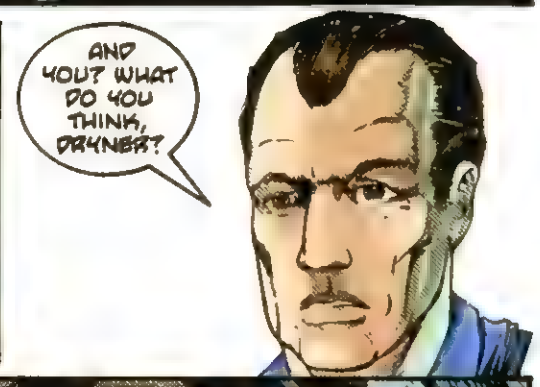
Patient Lockwood: It was shiny and wet and I think it wanted to kill me —
End transcript. Copy 2.3a2, Dr. Waidslaw Orona, Civilian Advisor, C.M.C.
FASCINATING ALL THESE REPORTS ARE FROM WITHIN A FIFTY-MILE RADIUS.
YES, DOCTOR ORONA. AND I'VE GOT A DOZEN MORE JUST THE SAME. EVERY PATIENT RATES "SENSITIVE" ON THE CRYER SCALE AND DOUBLE FIGURES ON THE EMERSON--
THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE CREATURES--THEY'RE CONSISTENT?
IDENTICAL.
SOME OF THE TECHNICIANS ON THE PSYCH SIDE DID A WORKUP POSTULATING DIFFERENT MODES OF COMMUNICATION FOR THE ALIEN CREATURES.
THE MOST PLAUSIBLE WAS TELEPATHY--OR AT LEAST SOME FORM OF TELEPATHY.
YOU THINK THEY'RE TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH US?
UNLIKELY. THE THE DATA WE'VE COLLECTED DOESN'T SUGGEST HIGHER INTELLIGENCE.
THE "SIGHTINGS" ARE RANDOM AND CONFINED TO A SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIC AREA--VERY ODD.
WE'VE KEPT THE EXISTENCE OF THE ALIEN CREATURES COMPLETELY SECRET. ALL OF A SUDDEN WE ARE EXPERIENCING A WAVE OF SPONTANEOUS TELEPATHIC EVENTS.
THE QUESTION IS, WHY NOW? AND WHY EARTH?


MOTHER! WHERE ARE YOU?
OH, JESUS. IT HURTS ALL OVER. I'M SCARED.
HE'S COMING OUT OF IT.
BP IS SLIGHTLY ELEVATED, HEART RATE AND RESPIRATION NORMAL. I SHOW NO MOVEMENT FROM THE PARASITE. IT APPEARS DORMANT.
YOUR NAME IS JAMES LIKOWSKI, YOU WERE CAPTAIN OF THE SPACE FREIGHTER JUNKET. YOU ARE ON EARTH IN A QUARANTINED MEDICAL FACILITY.
IF YOU'RE FEELING UP TO IT, WE'LL RELEASE YOU FROM THE STRAPS.
WHY AREN'T I DEAD?
BIONATIONAL

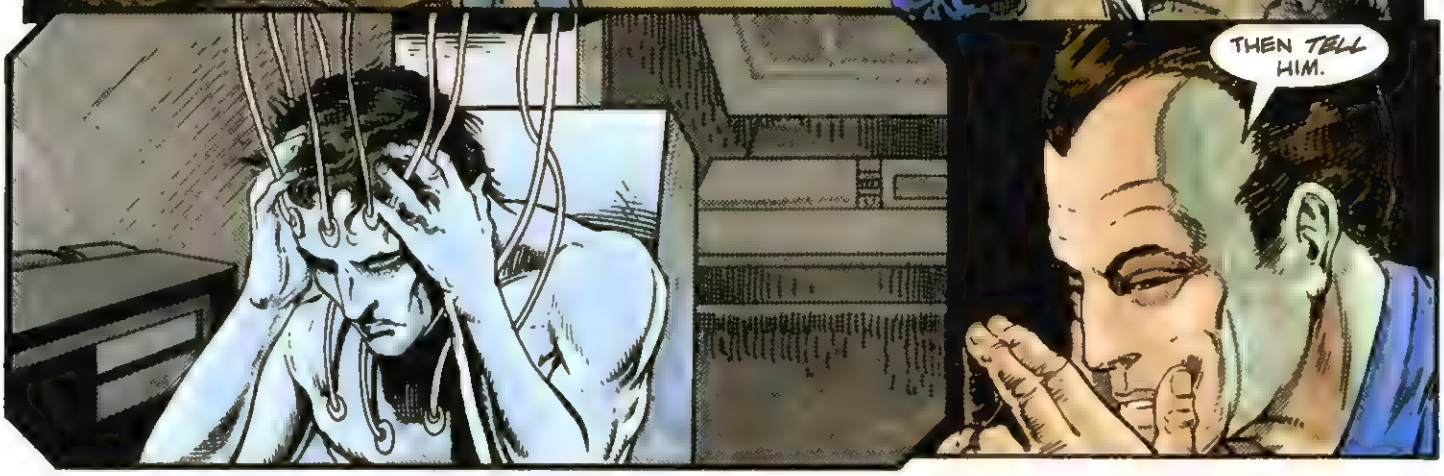
PLEASE. COULD SOMEONE TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED? I WANT TO SEE MY WIFE-- PLEASE--
HE LOOKS NORMAL ENOUGH.
HELL, HE'S WORTH BILLIONS. I WISH EVERYONE WERE THAT "NORMAL."

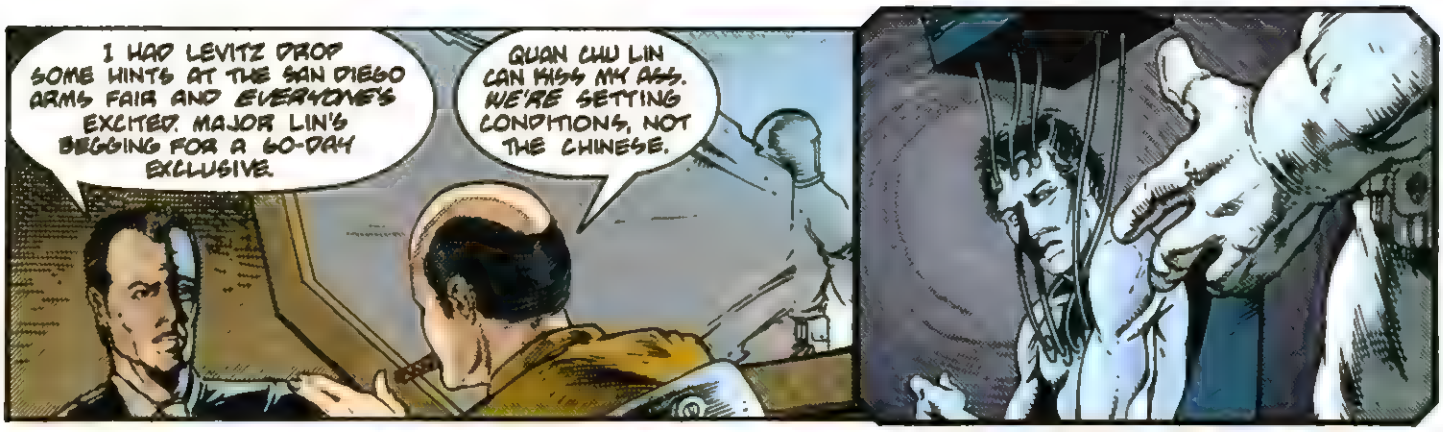
THE CREATURE HAS LODGED ITSELF IN THE SUBJECT'S DIGESTIVE SYSTEM, DRAWING RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF BLOOD AND FLUIDS
NEVERTHELESS, IT IS GROWING AT AN INCREDIBLE RATE.
WHAT ABOUT THE PILOT? DOES HE KNOW?


THERE'S BEEN SOME--DISCUSSION--ON THAT POINT.
ETHICAL QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN RAISED REGARDING THE PROPRIETY OF INFORMING THE SUBJECT, CONSIDERING THE ULTIMATE-- PROGNOSIS.


AND YOU? WHAT DO YOU THINK, DRYNER?

WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN UTTERLY NEW ALIEN LIFEFORM. REACTIONS OF THE HOST COULD BE IMPORTANT.
OF COURSE, IN THAT CASE, HE WOULD HAVE TO KNOW.


THEN TELL HIM.


I HAD LEVITZ DROP SOME HINTS AT THE SAN DIEGO ARMS FAIR AND EVERYONE'S EXCITED. MAJOR LIN'S BEGGING FOR A 60-DAY EXCLUSIVE.
QUAN CHU LIN CAN KISS MY ASS. WE'RE SETTING CONDITIONS, NOT THE CHINESE.

SO WHEN DOES DRYNER THINK WE'LL HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW?
COUPLE OF DAYS-- 72 HOURS, TOPS.
JESUS, YOU'VE BEEN STARING AT ME FOR HOURS. IS THAT ALL YOU WANT TO DO?
I'M SORRY. DOES IT BOTHER YOU?
NO-- I MEAN, IT'S YOUR MONEY.
IT'S MY MONEY.

WOMEN ARE BLESSED. THEY KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO BE JOINED WITH ANOTHER LIFE--
--TO SHARE THEMSELVES SELFLESSLY. IT MUST BE WONDER-FUL.

YEAH. WONDERFUL. MY BACK'S KILLING ME.

C'MON, BABE, YOU'RE MAKING ME FEEL WEIRD. ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT SOMETHING?
YES. I WANT TO KNOW HOW IT FEELS.

SALVAJE! WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?
STUDYING.

YEAH? WELL, STUDY THIS.
A COUPLE OF GOVERNMENT SUITS DROPPED BY THE SHOP TODAY. IT SEEMS THEY'RE REAL INTERESTED IN CHANNEL 2393.
WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?

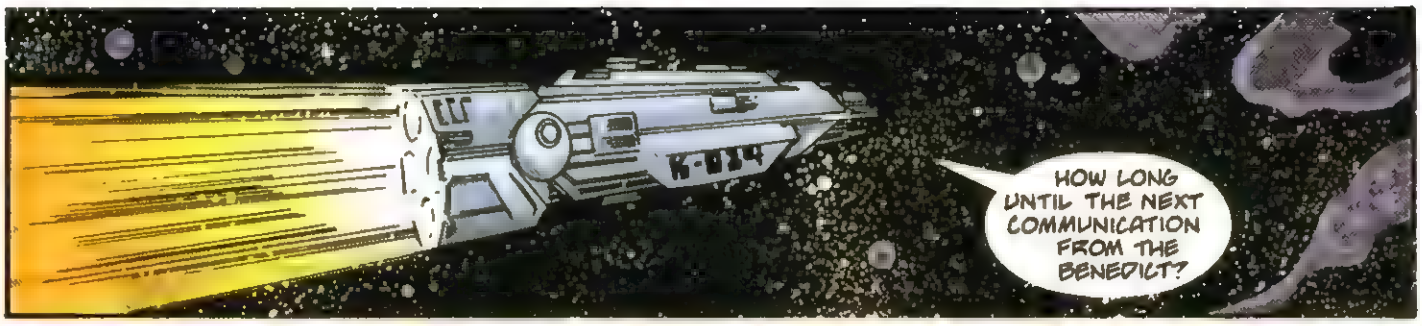
I DIDN'T TELL THEM SHIT. IF THEY KNEW I WAS HOOKING UP ILLEGALS THEY'D PULL MY LICENSE AND I'D LOSE ALL MY MILITARY CONTRACTS.

THEN EVERYTHING IS FINE.
NO, EVERYTHING IS NOT FINE.
LOOK, I'VE BEEN HOOKING UP YOU RELIGIOUS PSYCH JOBS FOR THREE YEARS NOW...

AND I'VE NEVER HAD PROBLEMS WITH THE FCC, COPS, OR ANYBODY ELSE--
UNTIL NOW.

DAMN IT, SALVAJE-- WHAT THE HELL IS THAT THING?

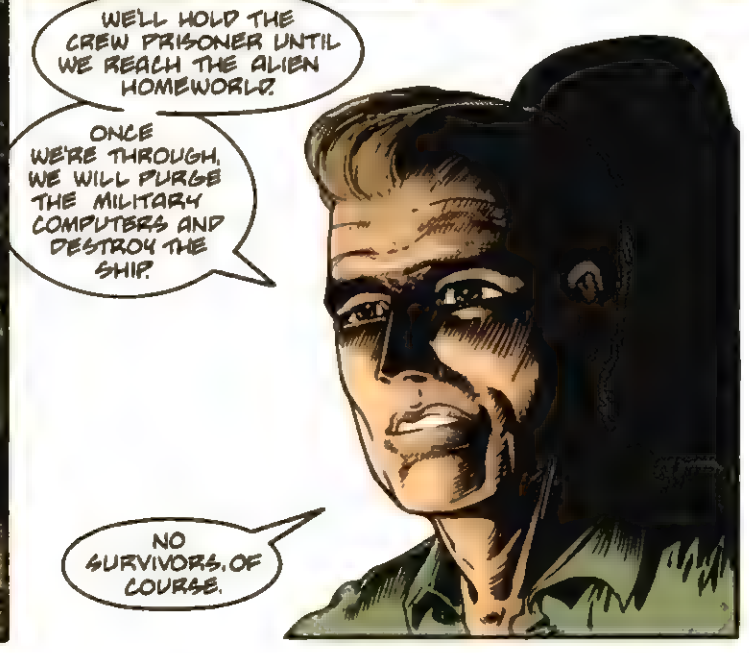
THE MESSIAH. THE IMMACULATE INCUBATION. GOD.
YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND! I'M THROUGH, SALVAJE! I'M NOT RISKING--
RISK? YOU TALK TO ME OF RISK?
AGGGH-- YOU'RE CRAZY--!
WHOMP!
DON'T BE AFRAID OF HIM. BELIEVE IN HIM. WE WILL CONTINUE THE MESSAGE AND FIND THE OTHERS WHO'VE SEEN THE VISION.
LOOK AT HIM!
YOU'RE NOTHING, I'M NOTHING! ONLY VESSELS, HERE TO SERVE THE TRUE MESSIAH...
...GLORIFIED IN HAVING BEEN CHOSEN FOR THE ULTIMATE COMMUNION.
THE BROADCASTS WILL CONTINUE. DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE GOVERNMENT, BE AFRAID OF ME.
NO!


K-034
HOW LONG UNTIL THE NEXT COMMUNICATION FROM THE BENEDICT?

ANOTHER HOUR. WE'RE ZEROED ON THEIR LOCAL ANTENNA. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET A CLEAR TRANSMISSION.
GOOD. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE. THEY'RE LOADED WITH D.S. SENSORS--
DON'T WANT THEM TO SPOT US UNTIL AFTER WE GO THROUGH GRAVITY BURN.

OKAY, ONE MORE TIME.
THE GOVERNMENT SHIP HAS FIVE BASIC ACCESS PORTS. TWO FORE, TWO AFT, AND THE LOADING BAY.
WE'LL BE GOING IN THROUGH THE #1 AFT LOCK.

YOU'LL ALL HAVE LOW-LEVEL BLASTERS. BE CAREFUL.
MILITARY SHIPS ARE ARMORED, BUT AN UNLUCKY SHOT COULD STILL RUPTURE THE HULL.
KASHUNK
SAVE THE GUNS FOR SOFT TARGETS--INTERNAL SYSTEMS, ELECTRONICS, CREW.

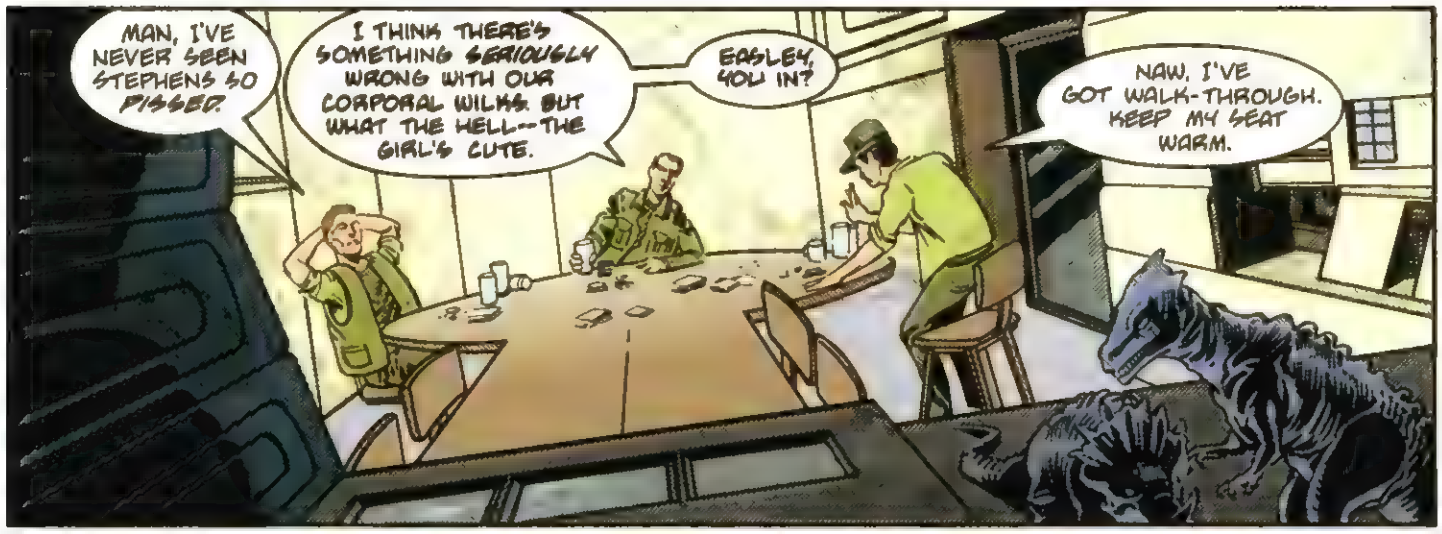

WE'LL HOLD THE CREW PRISONER UNTIL WE REACH THE ALIEN HOMEWORLD.
ONCE WE'RE THROUGH, WE WILL PURGE THE MILITARY COMPUTERS AND DESTROY THE SHIP.
NO SURVIVORS, OF COURSE.

I PULLED BILLIE OUT OF THE SPARE CARGO LOCK 12 HOURS AFTER LIFT OFF.
IT LOOKED LIKE THE DRUGS WERE WEARING OFF, THOUGH IT WAS HARD TO TELL.
I FELT SORRY FOR HER.
STEPHENS TOOK IT ABOUT AS WELL AS EXPECTED.
I TOLD THE BASE COMMANDER YOU WERE UNRELIABLE, WILKS. BUT THIS-- THIS IS INSANITY!
WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING? DID YOU THINK AT ALL?
I OFFER, NO EXCUSES SIR. I DID WHAT--
NO EXCUSES! OH, THAT'S VERY MANLY. MAYBE YOU COULD TRY AN EXPLANATION--IF NOT FOR ME, THEN FOR THE MEN.
EXPLAIN WHY YOU BROUGHT EXTRA WEIGHT ONTO A CAREFULLY BALANCED GRAVITY DRIVE SHIP--

IT'S NOT HIS FAULT--HE DID IT FOR ME--
OH, I UNDERSTAND NOW!
IT'S NOT HIS FAULT! YOU FORCED HIM TO STOW YOU ABOARD!
FORCED HIM TO JEOPARDIZE THE MISSION!

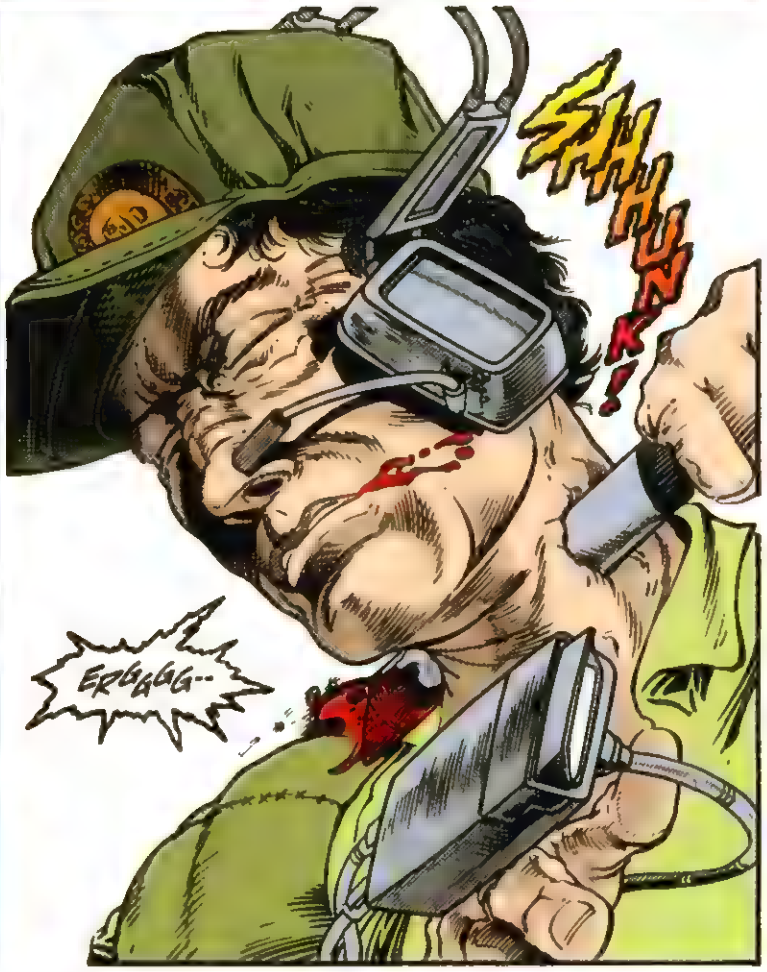
LEAVE HER OUT OF IT. IT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY. AND THE GRAVITY BALANCE IS NOMINAL.
I DUMPED 104 POUNDS OF THAT RASPBERRY-FLAVORED SHIT FROM THE SHIP'S STORES JUST BEFORE WE TOOK OFF.
SHUT UP, BUELLER.
I LIKED THAT RASPBERRY-FLAVORED SHIT.

I SHOULD LOCK YOUR ASS UP AND KEEP YOU THERE UNTIL THE COURT MARTIAL.
I'M SURE THE MILITARY COURT WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HEARING HOW A TOP-SECRET, MILITARY VESSEL LEFT BASE...
...WITHOUT A THOROUGH INSPECTION BY THE COMMANDING OFFICER. SIR.
BUT THE MISSION COMES AHEAD OF MY PERSONAL DESIRES. OKAY--
THE GIRL IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, WILKS WE'LL SETTLE THE REST WHEN WE RETURN TO EARTH.
IF WE RETURN TO EARTH.


MAN, I'VE NEVER SEEN STEPHENS SO PISSED.
I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING SERIOUSLY WRONG WITH OUR CORPORAL WILKS. BUT WHAT THE HELL--THE GIRL'S CUTE.
EASLEY, YOU IN?
NAW, I'VE GOT WALK-THROUGH. KEEP MY SEAT WARM.

THIS IS EASLEY. I'M IN SECTION A FOR APPLE 5. NO VISIBLE HULL STRESS. PROCEEDING INTO A FOR APPLE 6.
BENEDICT TO K-OIH, PREPARE FOR TRANSMISSION OF UPDATED TELEMETRY DATA--
WHAT THE HELL?
OUR ETA WITH THE HOMEWORLD IS--

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?
DO THE OTHERS KNOW--


SHHUNK!
ERGGGG--

AIRLOCK
THUNK
OPEN
CLOSE
SSSHHHH
UKK-- UH--GHHHH--
SSSS HUFF
GAAARRRGH--!
CLUNG!
UKKK-- KAKKKK--
ZZZZZZZOP!
INTERNAL AIRLOCK
CLOSE
CAUTION
OPEN
THUNK

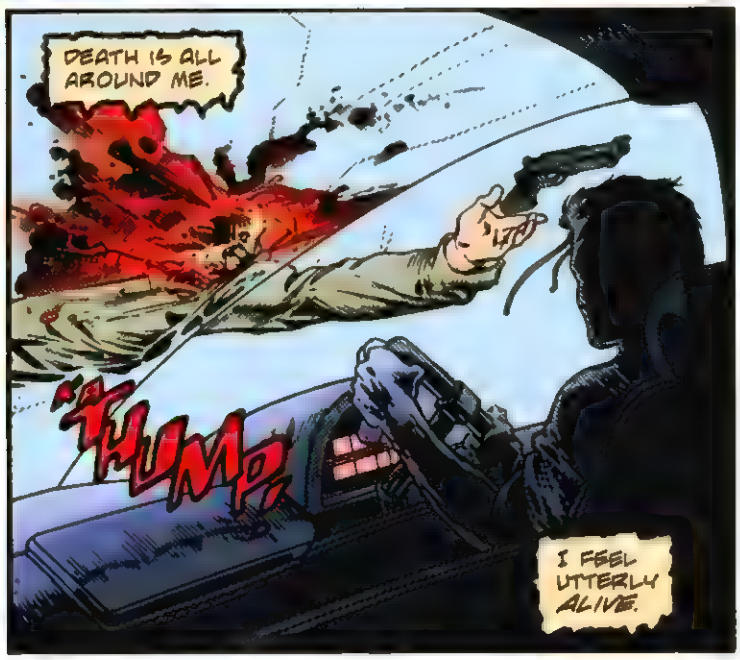
WHAT TH--
SOMEBODY'S OPENING THE *H AIRLOCK--!
CLICK
ARMOR
NODDKK-- UK--NO--
WHO THE HELL'S DOWN THERE?
THE AREA SHOULD BE CLEAR. CHRIST, WE'RE A COUPLE OF HOURS AWAY FROM GRAVITY BURN.
NO-- AWHGGLG--
EXTERIO AIRLOC
OPEN

JE-SUS. SOMEBODY'S GONE OUTSIDE--!
GET STEPHENS AND WILKS UP HERE-- NOW!
GET ME A PICTURE, DAMMIT!
WHAT'S THE PROB--WHO THE HELL IS THAT?
WE'RE NOT SURE. HE'S NOT RESPOND-ING.
DAMN!

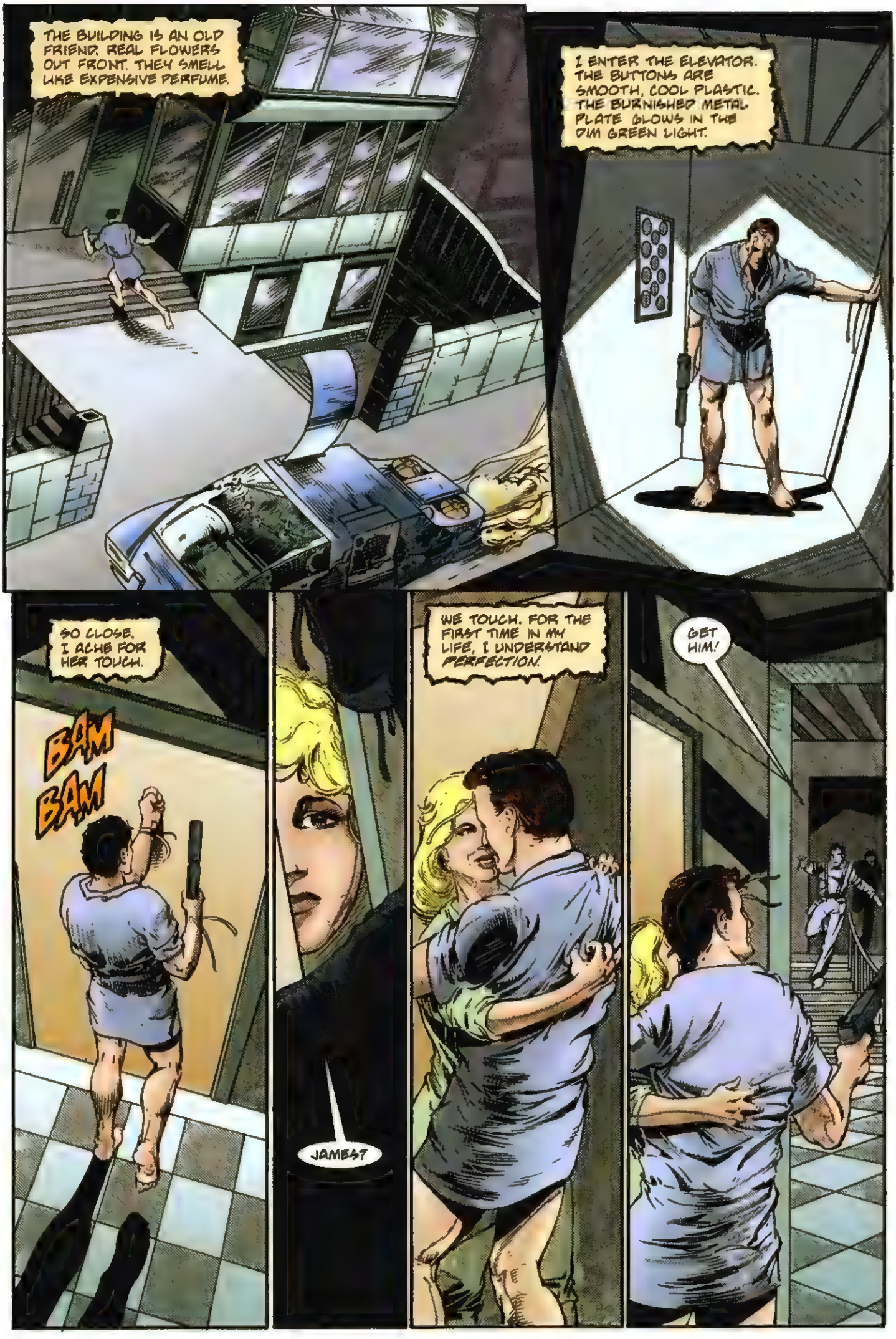
THE PAIN--LIKE A SCREAM INSIDE ME--OH, GOD--
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, HOLD HIM DOWN!
I'M TRYING! WE NEED SOME TRANKS IN HERE, NOW!
I WANT TO LIVE--!
I WANT TO LIVE!
AGGGGHH!
UHH--!
BRRRRRRR!
IT'S THE SUBJECT--HE'S BROKEN AWAY AND--
AUGHH!
BRRRRR!
SKRRSSH!

THE GUARDS ARE DEAD. I WANT TO KILL MORE. I CAN HEAR ALARMS. DON'T CARE.
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!
CAN'T CARE.
GOT TO GET OUTSIDE. I WANT TO FEEL THE SUN.
POW!
POW!
URGHHH!
HOT OUTSIDE. WET WITH HUMIDITY.
HZ
UNLOADI
ZONE
GET OUT OF THE CAR!
OH MY GOD--!

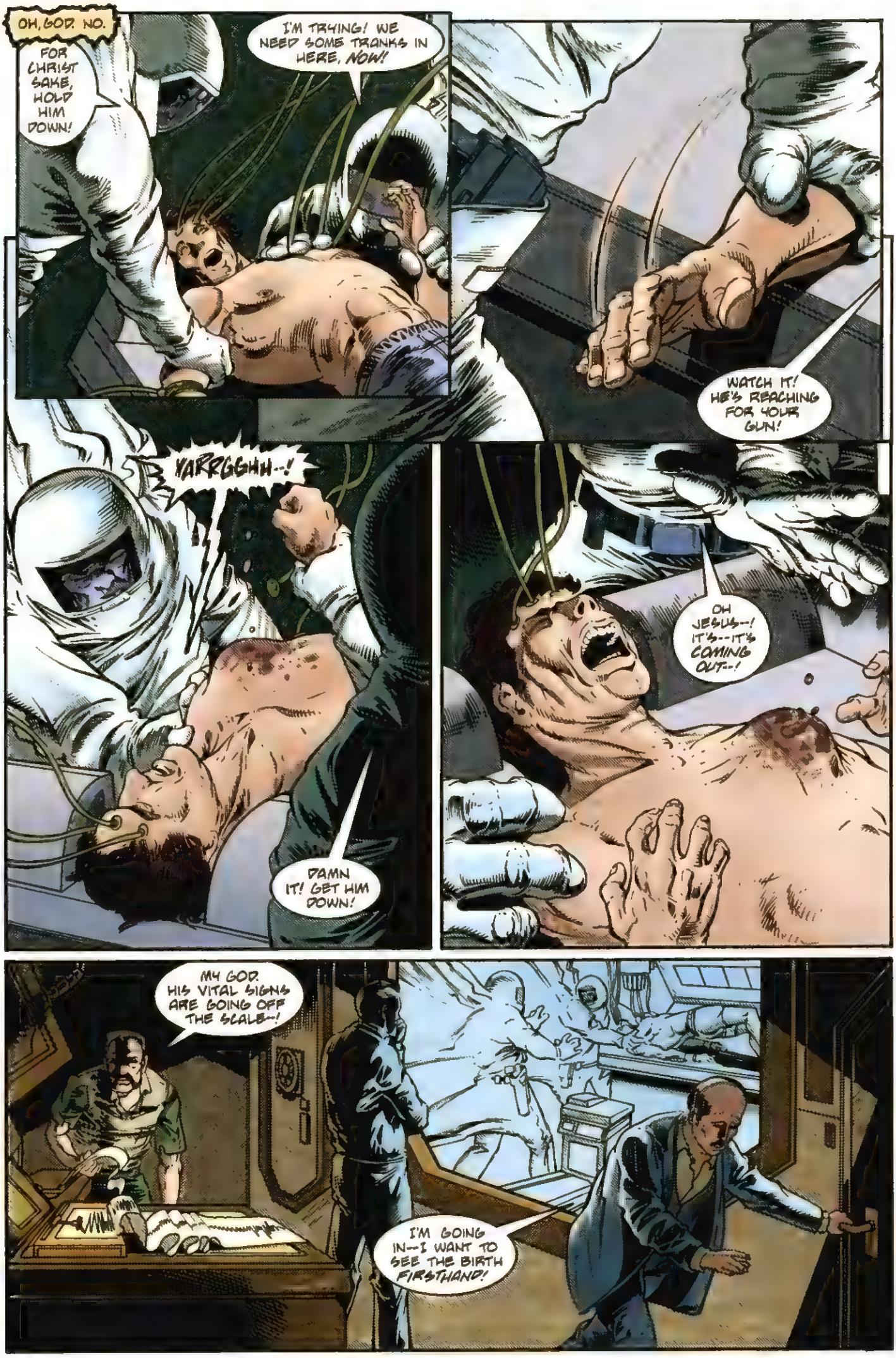
LEATHER SEATS--SMOOTH, SOFT-- I SMELL HOT OZONE AS I ALLELERATE.
SPAK
SPAK
SPAK


DEATH IS ALL AROUND ME.
THUMP!
I FEEL UTTERLY ALIVE.

THE EXPRESSWAY CUTS DIRECTLY THROUGH THE CITY. I AM THINKING OF MY WIFE.
THEY TRY TO STOP ME, BUT IT ISN'T POSSIBLE.
BAW HAM SSSSSSS
THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND. THIS IS MY TIME. I CANNOT BE DENIED.
EEEEEMMRGSSS
I SEE ORANGE FLAMES. THERE IS A BURST OF HEAT. I WANT THEM TO SUFFER.


THE BUILDING IS AN OLD FRIEND. REAL FLOWERS OUT FRONT. THEY SMELL LIKE EXPENSIVE PERFUME.
I ENTER THE ELEVATOR. THE BUTTONS ARE SMOOTH, COOL PLASTIC. THE BURNISHED METAL PLATE GLOWS IN THE DIM GREEN LIGHT.
SO CLOSE. I ACHE FOR HER TOUCH.
BAM
BAM
JAMES?
WE TOUCH. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I UNDERSTAND PERFECTION.
GET HIM!

THE MOMENT ENDS.
UGGH!
I HOLD MY WIFE'S HAND. IT IS WARM.
WE HAVE NOWHERE TO GO. I AIM FOR THE SUN. THE HEAT IS A BLANKET. I FORCE THE SHIP TO FLY HIGHER.
I KNOW THIS BECAUSE I AM THERE.
THE CONTROL PANEL GLOWS A HUNDRED COLORS.
I TURN TOWARDS MY WIFE. SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.
MY GOD, THE SUN-- IT'S SO BRIGHT.


OH, GOD. NO.
FOR CHRIST SAKE, HOLD HIM DOWN!
I'M TRYING! WE NEED SOME TRANKS IN HERE, NOW!
WATCH IT! HE'S REACHING FOR YOUR GUN!
YARRGGHH--!
DAMN IT! GET HIM DOWN!
OH JESUS--! IT'S--IT'S COMING OUT--!
MY GOD. HIS VITAL SIGNS ARE GOING OFF THE SCALE--!
I'M GOING IN--I WANT TO SEE THE BIRTH FIRSTHAND!

I'D FEEL BETTER IF YOU WAITED WITH ME.
WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG?
IT'S HARD TO TELL. HE SEEMS TO BE--FIGHTING IT.
THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. I JUST WANT TO BE--PART OF IT.
ERRGGHH!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN FIGHTING IT?
CAN HE HURT IT--?
WE DON'T KNOW--NOBODY KNOWS! STAND AWAY, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? THIS ENTIRE PROJECT DEPENDS ON YOU--!
YOU--
WANT IT--?

YOU--
CAN--
HAVE IT--
YAAAAGHH!
REINE!
AAAHHH--!
YAAAAAAAAAAA
YOU STUPID SON OF A BITCH--YOU'RE EXPOSING THE ENTIRE LAB--!
ALERT
HELP--ME--!

--SYSTEMS BREECH--JESUS--THAT'S IMPOSS--
OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD--
REINE--!
I THINK I CAN HIT IT IF IT JUST HOLDS--
NO!
FOW!
BRRRRRRRP!
HAD TO SAVE IT--TOO IMPORTANT--
REINE WOULD UNDERSTAND. WE NEED THE ALIEN ALIVE.

YOUR NAME IS PINDAR. UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE BAINES AMENDMENT, YOU'VE BEEN DECLARED A TERRORIST.

YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS UNDER AMERICAN LAW. ANY MEANS MAY BE USED TO ELICIT INFORMATION, UP TO AND INCLUDING PHYSICAL TORTURE.

I-- I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING.

SPINAL BLOCKS. WE'VE DEADENED EVERYTHING FROM THE NECK DOWN.

DON'T WORRY. IT'S NOT PERMANENT. YET.

LET'S MAKE IT SIMPLE. TELL US ABOUT THE CHURCH. TELL US THEIR PLANS FOR THE CREATURES.

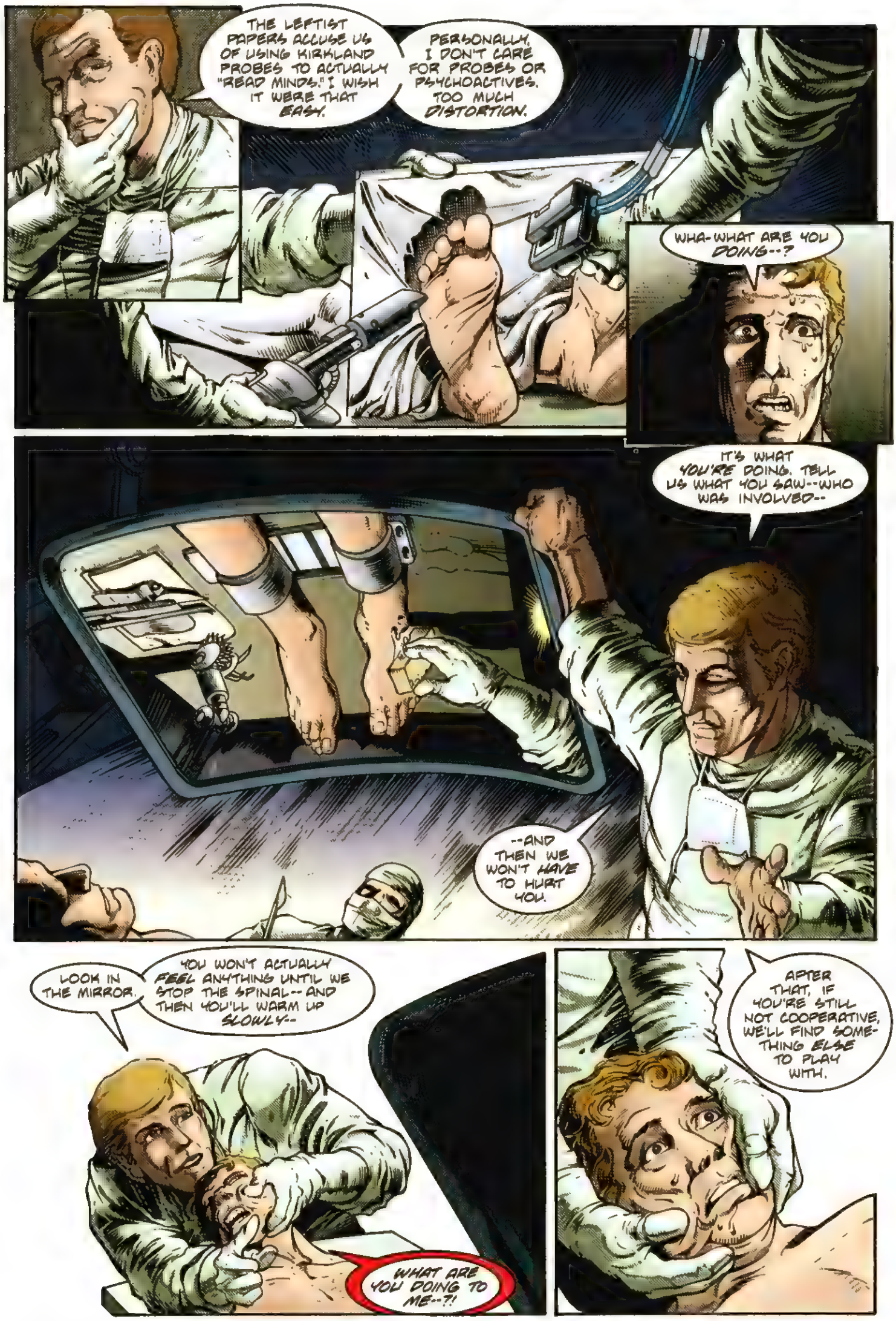
IF THEY FIND OUT I'VE TOLD YOU--

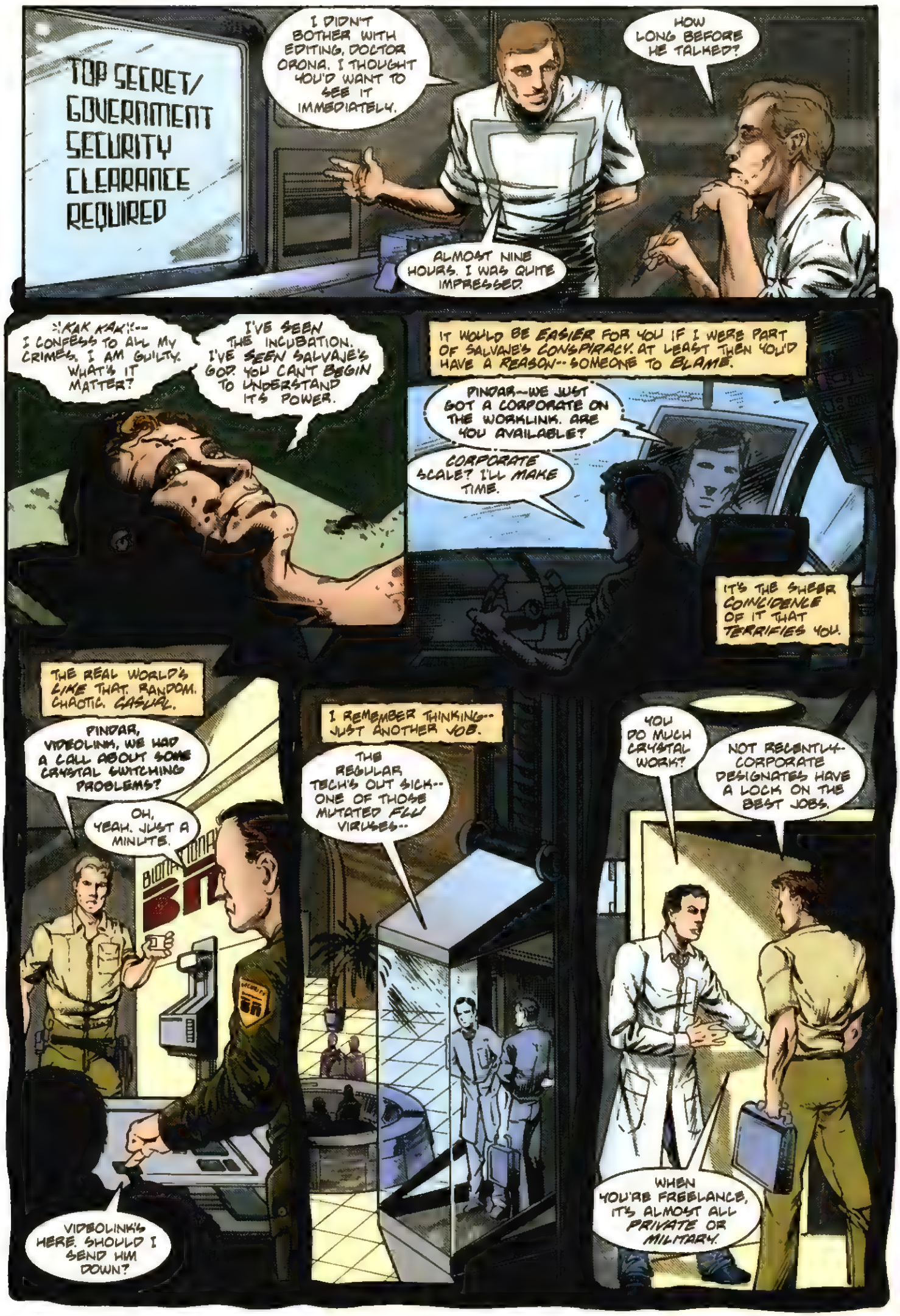
--THEY'LL MAKE ME ONE OF THEM--

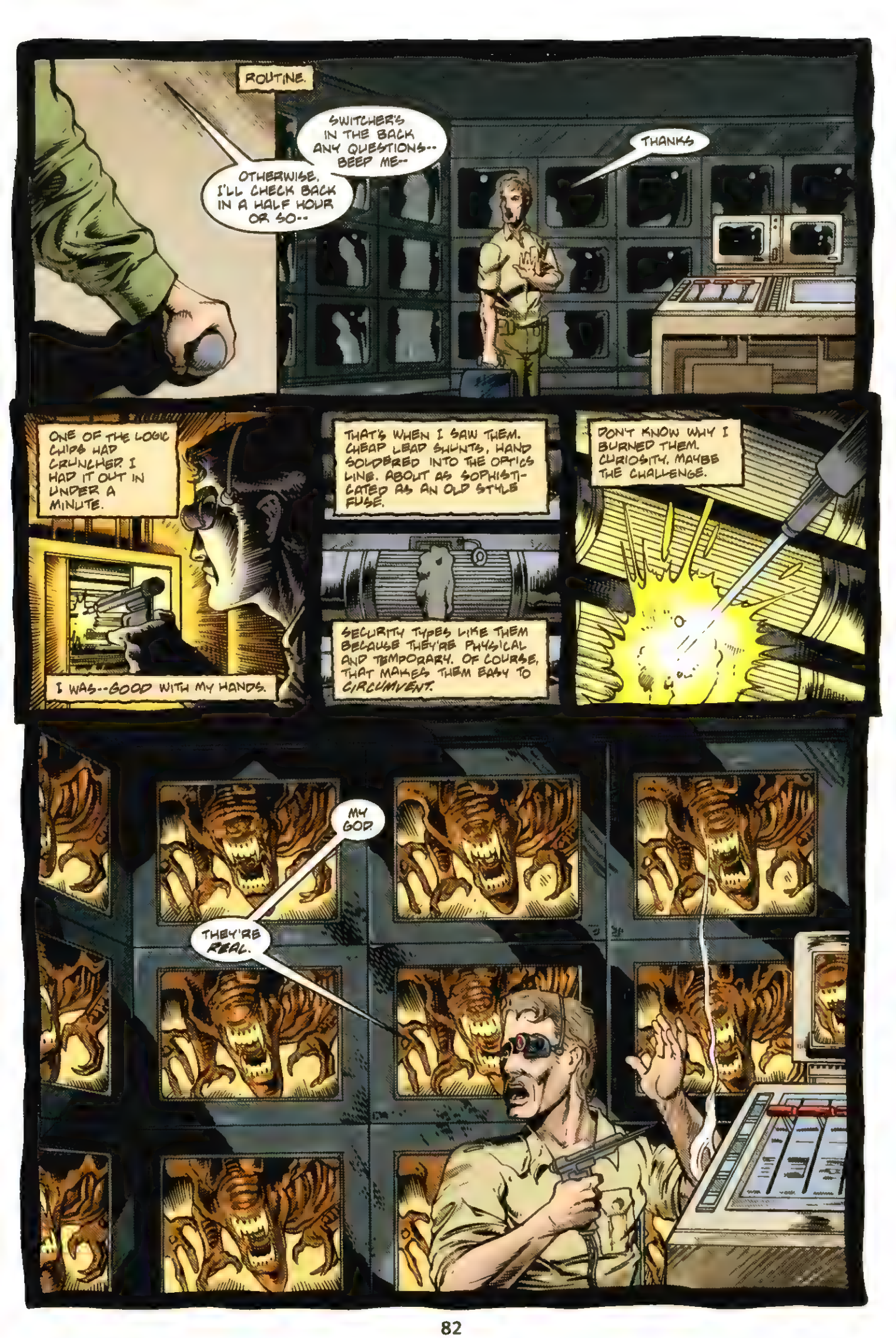
I'M TOLD YOU'RE A VIDEO TECHNICIAN-- GOOD WITH YOUR HANDS. THAT'S WHY I'M GOING TO START WITH YOUR LEGS

WE USED TO DO THIS WITHOUT ANESTHESIA...

...BUT THERE WERE TERRIBLE COMPLICATIONS FROM THE SHOCK.

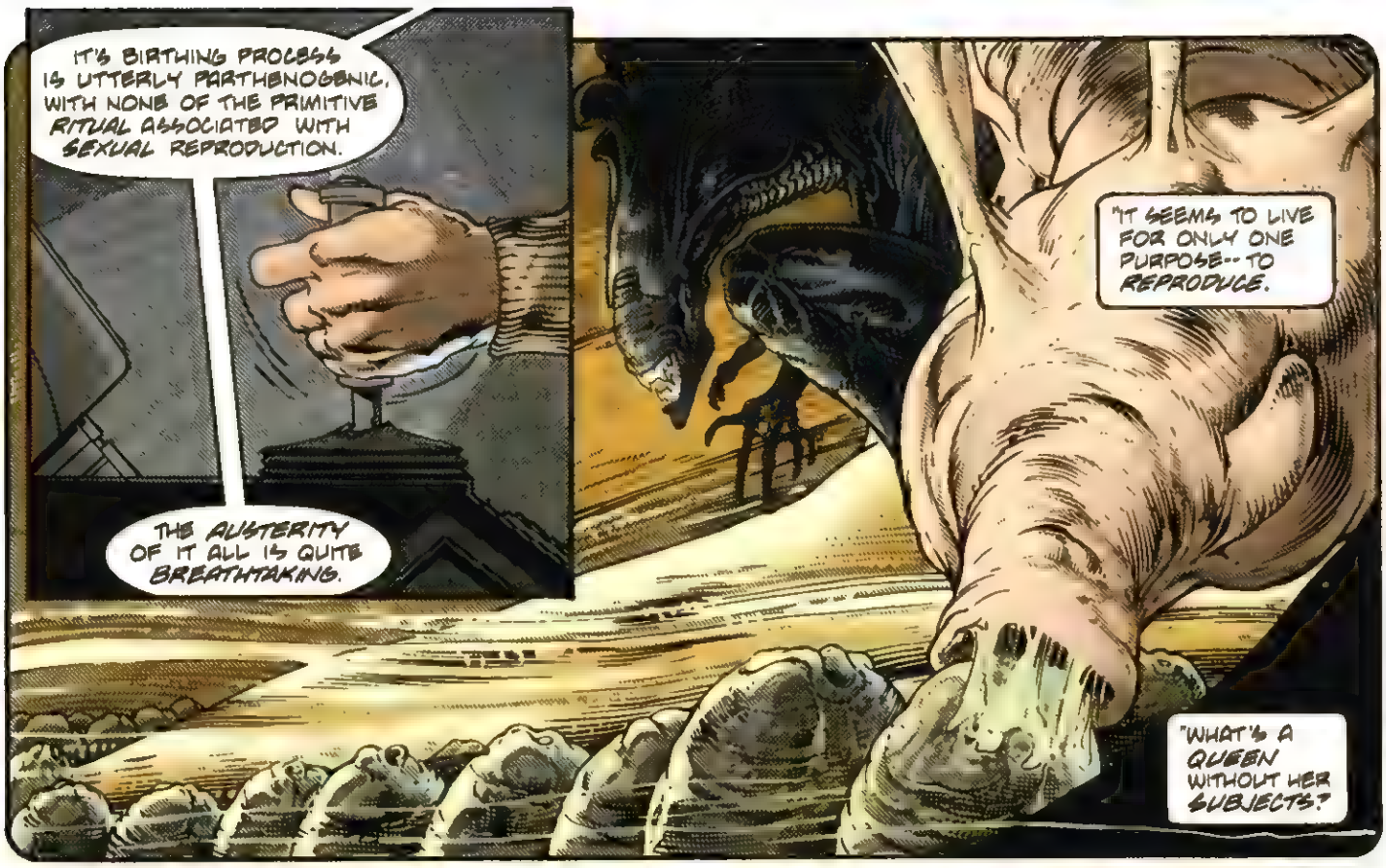

THE LEFTIST PAPERS ACCUSE US OF USING KIRKLAND PROBES TO ACTUALLY "READ MINDS." I WISH IT WERE THAT EASY.
PERSONALLY, I DON'T CARE FOR PROBES OR PSYCHOACTIVES. TOO MUCH DISTORTION.
WHA-WHAT ARE YOU DOING--?
IT'S WHAT YOU'RE DOING. TELL US WHAT YOU SAW--WHO WAS INVOLVED--
--AND THEN WE WON'T HAVE TO HURT YOU.
LOOK IN THE MIRROR.
YOU WON'T ACTUALLY FEEL ANYTHING UNTIL WE STOP THE SPINAL--AND THEN YOU'LL WARM UP SLOWLY--
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME--?!
AFTER THAT, IF YOU'RE STILL NOT COOPERATIVE, WE'LL FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO PLAY WITH.


TOP SECRET/ GOVERNMENT SECURITY CLEARANCE REQUIRED
I DIDN'T BOTHER WITH EDITING, DOCTOR ORONA. I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO SEE IT IMMEDIATELY.
HOW LONG BEFORE HE TALKED?
ALMOST NINE HOURS. I WAS QUITE IMPRESSED.
"KAK KAK"-- I CONFESS TO ALL MY CRIMES. I AM GUILTY. WHAT'S IT MATTER?
I'VE SEEN THE INCUBATION. I'VE SEEN SALVAJE'S GOD. YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND ITS POWER.
IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR YOU IF I WERE PART OF SALVAJE'S CONSPIRACY. AT LEAST THEN YOU'D HAVE A REASON-- SOMEONE TO BLAME.
PINDAR--WE JUST GOT A CORPORATE ON THE WORKLINK. ARE YOU AVAILABLE?
CORPORATE SCALE? I'LL MAKE TIME.
IT'S THE SHEER COINCIDENCE OF IT THAT TERRIFIES YOU.
THE REAL WORLD'S LIKE THAT. RANDOM. CHAOTIC. CASUAL.
PINDAR, VIDEOLINK, WE HAD A CALL ABOUT SOME CRYSTAL SWITCHING PROBLEMS?
OH, YEAH. JUST A MINUTE.
VIDEOLINK'S HERE. SHOULD I SEND HIM DOWN?
I REMEMBER THINKING-- JUST ANOTHER JOB.
THE REGULAR TECH'S OUT SICK-- ONE OF THOSE MUTATED FLU VIRUSES--
YOU DO MUCH CRYSTAL WORK?
NOT RECENTLY-- CORPORATE DESIGNATES HAVE A LOCK ON THE BEST JOBS.
WHEN YOU'RE FREELANCE, IT'S ALMOST ALL PRIVATE OR MILITARY.


ROUTINE.
SWITCHER'S IN THE BACK ANY QUESTIONS-- BEEP ME--
OTHERWISE, I'LL CHECK BACK IN A HALF HOUR OR SO--
THANKS
ONE OF THE LOGIC CHIPS HAD CRUNCHED. I HAD IT OUT IN UNDER A MINUTE.
I WAS--GOOD WITH MY HANDS.
THAT'S WHEN I SAW THEM. CHEAP LEAD SHUNTS, HAND SOLDERED INTO THE OPTICS LINE. ABOUT AS SOPHISTICATED AS AN OLD STYLE FUSE.
SECURITY TYPES LIKE THEM BECAUSE THEY'RE PHYSICAL AND TEMPORARY. OF COURSE, THAT MAKES THEM EASY TO CIRCUMVENT.
DON'T KNOW WHY I BURNED THEM. CURIOSITY. MAYBE THE CHALLENGE.
MY GOD.
THEY'RE REAL.

HELLO AGAIN. IT'S OSTROW. JUST CHECKING IN.
THE OTHERS HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR SACRIFICE, BUT I REMEMBER. I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER.
WE CAPTURED IT WHILE IT FED ON YOU--
"--IT SEEMED TO NEED THAT PRIMITIVE ANIMAL KINSHIP. WHILE IT ACCLIMATED TO THE ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT, YOU WERE ITS HOME.
"YOU GAVE IT YOUR BODY-- YOUR LIFE--"
AT LEAST YOU DIDN'T DIE IN VAIN.
"YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN THRILLED WITH OUR PROGRESS. ORIGINALLY, OF COURSE, WE'D MERELY PLANNED TO STUDY THE SPECIMEN WHILE AWAITING THE RETURN OF THE K-104.
"FOR ONCE, WE HAD A BIT OF LUCK."

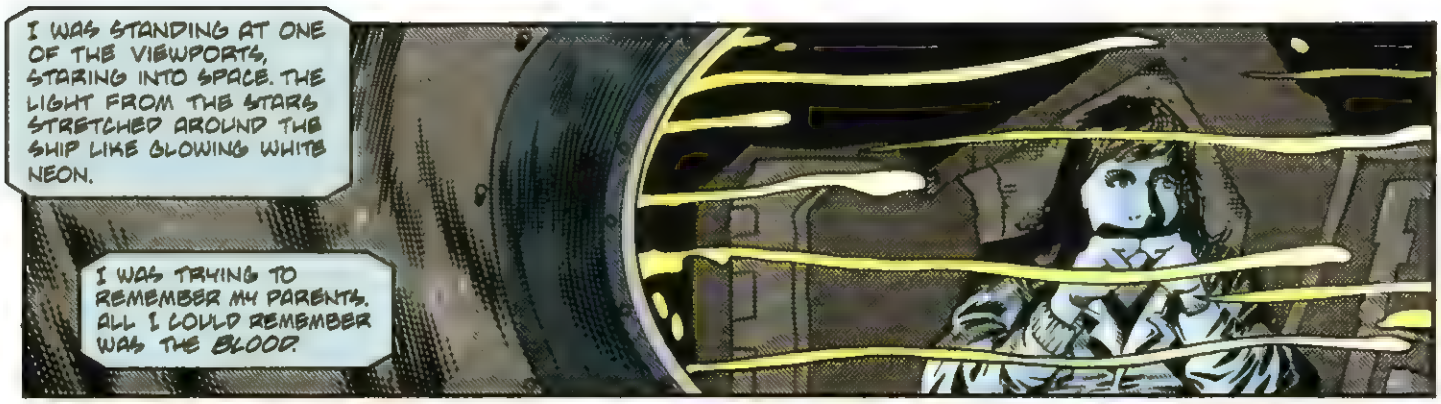
"YOU SEE THE CREATURE WE CAPTURED WAS A QUEEN--
"--AND THAT CHANGED THINGS."

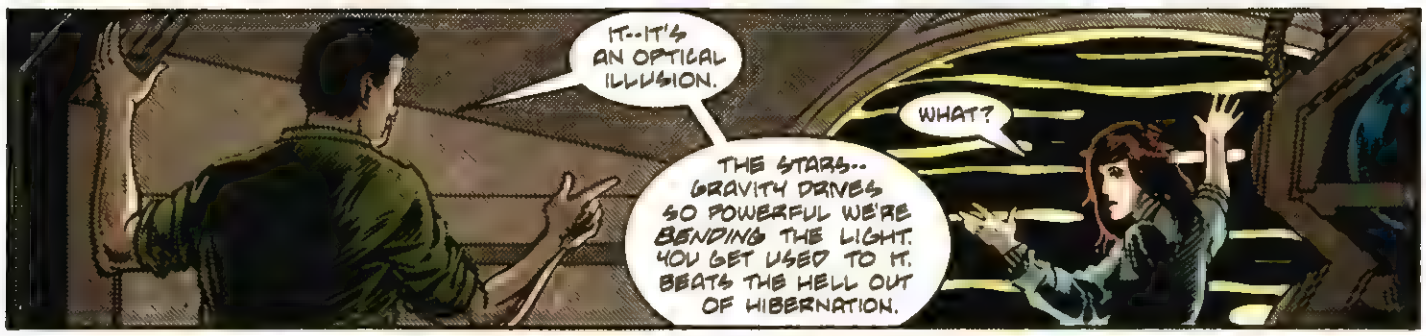

IT'S BIRTHING PROCESS IS UTTERLY PARTHENOGENIC, WITH NONE OF THE PRIMITIVE RITUAL ASSOCIATED WITH SEXUAL REPRODUCTION.
THE AUSTERITY OF IT ALL IS QUITE BREATHTAKING.
"IT SEEMS TO LIVE FOR ONLY ONE PURPOSE-- TO REPRODUCE.
"WHAT'S A QUEEN WITHOUT HER SUBJECTS?

"THE MARKETING PEOPLE WANT US TO HOLD OFF ON FURTHER TESTING UNTIL THEY CAN PUT TOGETHER A PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE NOVEMBER WEA-TECH CONFERENCE.
"EVEN WITH THE SECRECY, BIONATIONAL'S INVESTMENT RATING HAS DOUBLED ON THE INTERNATIONAL BOARDS.

"OUR ORGANIC WEAPONS PROGRAM IS GOING TO REVOLUTIONIZE THE INDUSTRY.

"I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU--
"--FOR US."


I WAS STANDING AT ONE OF THE VIEWPORTS, STARING INTO SPACE. THE LIGHT FROM THE STARS STRETCHED AROUND THE SHIP LIKE GLOWING WHITE NEON.
I WAS TRYING TO REMEMBER MY PARENTS. ALL I COULD REMEMBER WAS THE BLOOD.


IT--IT'S AN OPTICAL ILLUSION.
WHAT?
THE STARS-- GRAVITY DRIVES SO POWERFUL WE'RE BENDING THE LIGHT. YOU GET USED TO IT. BEATS THE HELL OUT OF HIBERNATION.

THE MARINES WERE WORK OF CAPTAIN STEPHENS IN THE AFTERMATH OF PRIVATE EASLEY'S DEATH. STEPHENS INSISTED IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, CLOSING THE INVESTIGATION BEFORE IT STARTED.
I COULD UNDERSTAND THAT ATTITUDE FROM STEPHENS. BUT WHAT ABOUT WILKS?
HELLO AGAIN. MIND IF I SIT HERE?
NO-- I MEAN, IT'S ALRIGHT.

IN THE MIDST OF THIS, WHAT DID BUELLER SEE IN ME?
CORPORAL WILKS MUST THINK A LOT OF YOU TO STOW YOU ON BOARD.
STEPHENS IS GOING TO HAVE HIS ASS ONCE WE'RE BACK ON EARTH.
WILKS AND I--UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

YEAH-- I'LL BET YOU UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER REAL WELL--
COULDN'T HE FIND SOMEONE HIS OWN AGE TO--
KNOCK IT OFF, RAMIREZ.

--I SAID KNOCK IT OFF!

NO ONE HAD EVER SHOWN INTEREST IN ME BEFORE. AT FIRST IT DIDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
THIS IS WHERE WE STOW THE BLASTERS AND THE REST OF THE PORTABLE GEAR. HERE, LET ME--
DON'T-- TOUCH ME.
I-I'M SORRY. I'M JUST--
IT'S OKAY. MY FAULT.
EVER BEEN AROUND THESE THINGS BEFORE?
ONCE. WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
REALLY. YOU MUST HAVE RUN WITH A ROUGH CROWD.
THEN I REALIZED--HE WAS LIKE ME. HE KNEW HOW IT FELT TO BE ALONE.
WHAT MADE YOU JOIN THE MARINES? DON'T YOU MISS YOUR FAMILY?
THE MARINES ARE MY FAMILY.
LISTEN, ABOUT CORPORAL WILKS.
IF THERE IS SOMETHING BETWEEN--
SWIH.
TELL ME WHY YOU HIT RAMIREZ BACK IN THE COMMISSARY.
RAMIREZ'S GOT A BIG MOUTH. HE HAD NO RIGHT TO SAY WHAT HE DID.
AND I WAS AFRAID IT MIGHT BE TRUE.

WILKS GAVE ME A SCHEDULE OF TOKEN ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES TO KEEP ME OCCUPIED DURING THE VOYAGE.
HATRED OF THE ALIENS BURNED INSIDE HIM LIKE AN OPEN FLAME. IT WAS ALL THAT SUSTAINED HIM.
PRIVATE BUELLER! DO YOU HAVE BUSINESS AT THIS STATION?
HE'D LOST ALL SENSE OF COMPASSION. HE SHRUGGED OFF BASLEY'S DEATH AS IF IT WERE TRIVIAL--AN ANNOYANCE.
I SHARED HIS HATRED OF THE ALIENS, BUT SUDDENLY OUR BITTER QUEST SEEMED EMPTY--ALMOST UGLY.
WILKS-- HE WAS ONLY--
GET BACK WITH THE OTHERS, SOLDIER! NOW.
I SAW WHAT HE WAS DOING! IT'S GOING TO STOP, EVEN IF I HAVE TO CONFINE BOTH OF YOU TO YOUR QUARTERS.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? BUELLER WAS--
MY GOD. YOU'RE JEALOUS.
I'M NOT A CHILD ANYMORE. BUELLER'S MY FRIEND--
--MAYBE MY ONLY FRIEND. I WON'T LET YOU RUIN THAT.

WE FOUND AN UNUSED STORAGE UNIT BEHIND THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT AND MET AS OFTEN AS WE COULD. IT WAS ALL SO NEW TO ME.
--SOMETIMES I FEEL SO FRIGHTENED-- LIKE I'M STILL EIGHT YEARS OLD--
THAT'S NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.
I'M FRIGHTENED OF THE WAY I FEEL ABOUT YOU.
I WONDER HOW THAT WILL CHANGE WHEN WE REACH THE HOMEWORLD.
MAYBE WILKS HAD BEEN HATING SO LONG--
--HE'D FORGOTTEN WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO CARE ABOUT SOMEONE.
I--I'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE.
NEITHER HAVE I.
MAYBE I HAD BEEN LOCKED AWAY SO LONG I'D NEVER HAD THE CHANCE TO TRY.
WE STOOD AT THE VIEWPORT, STARING INTO SPACE.
THE ALIENS DESTROYED MY LIFE ONCE. I COULDN'T STOP THEM THEN-- BUT I COULD STOP IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.
THE LIGHT FROM THE STARS STRETCHED AROUND THE SHIP LIKE BANDS OF GLOWING WHITE NEON.

:KAK KAK:- --THE BIONATIONAL PEOPLE NEVER SUSPECTED. I REPLACED THE SHUNTS-- PRETENDED NOTHING HAD HAPPENED--
--ALL THE TIME KNOWING THAT I HAD TO FIND SALVAJE.
PINDAR--GOT ANOTHER CALL FOR YOU. MAIN FEED'S GONE DOWN AT THE--
GET SOMEBODY ELSE.
OPEN UP, YOU CRAZY BASTARD! LET ME IN--!
POM POM POM
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
WELCOME. I AM DIDI. WE ARE--
SALVAJE-- DAMN YOU, I'VE SEEN IT-- IT'S REAL!
SALVAJE'S VISION HAD TAPPED INTO SOMETHING PRIMAL, UNCONTROLLABLE. AS HIS MESSAGE SPREAD, THE DEVOTED SOUGHT HIM OUT--PROVIDED FOR HIM.
WELCOME BROTHER. PLEASE JOIN US IN OUR--
WHERE THE HELL IS HE?

WE KNOW.
SALVAJE'S CONGREGATION GATHERED CLOSER, WATCHING IN UTTER SILENCE. I TOLD THEM WHAT I HAD SEEN.
THERE WAS NO SURPRISE. IT WAS AS IF THEY WERE EXPECTING ME.
IT TOOK ME A MOMENT TO TRULY UNDERSTAND.
THE VISION HAD OVERWHELMED THEM. WHERE I WAS SEEING MONSTERS--
--THEY WERE SEEING SALVATION.

EVERYTHING QUIET?
GOT A GLITCH IN ONE OF THE INFRA-REDS, BUT MAINTENANCE SAID THEY'D--
WAIT A MINUTE.
MOTION SENSORS JUST PICKED HER UP. SHOULD I ACTIVATE THE GRID?
MAYBE ONE OF THE EXECUTIVES FORGOT TO PUNCH HER IN. TRY A LONG RANGE RETINAL AND A PHOTO I.D. SEARCH.
BIONATIONAL
I'M NOT GETTING ANYTHING.
--OH, JESUS. I'M PICKING UP MOVEMENT ALL OVER THE SITE.
TURN ON ALL THE HOT GUNS AND THE AUTOMATICS-- BURN UP EVERYTHING ON THE PERIMETER.
WHAT'S THAT SHE'S WEARING ON HER--
KA-WHAMM!

SALVAJE'S CONGREGATION POURED INTO THE BIONATIONAL COMPLEX. I WAS STUNNED BY THEIR POWER.
I WANT EVERYBODY ON HARD FIRE STANDBY, LOCKED AND LOADED. NOBODY GETS IN.
WHO IN THE HELL COULD HAVE--
GUNS DIDN'T FRIGHTEN THEM. DEATH DIDN'T FRIGHTEN THEM. NOTHING MATTERED BUT THE CAUSE.
IT WASN'T THAT THEY WEREN'T FEELING THE PAIN. THEY JUST DIDN'T CARE.
KEEP FIRING! KEEP FIRING!
BRRP!
BRRP!
WE NEED MORE MEN-- WE CAN'T--
AAHHGGG--!
SALVAJE WANTED ME TO SEE EVERYTHING. EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE BLOOD AND DEATH, HE FELT IT IMPORTANT THAT I BELIEVE.
DANGER
BIOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT

THE CREATURE WATCHED PASSIVELY, HOVERING PROTECTIVELY OVER ITS BROOD.
WE HAVE COME TO CONSUMMATE OUR LOVE--TO PURGE THE VISION FROM OUR MINDS--
--TO BE ONE WITH YOU.
TAKE ME. TAKE ME. TA--
IT BURST OUT IN A GLISTENING BLUR, VISCOUS TENDRILS OF FLUID FLUTTERING BEHIND IT LIKE SOME OBSCENE AFTERBIRTH.
I COULD SEE HIS MOUTH TWISTING IN PAIN AS THE CREATURE ATTACHED ITSELF--
--AND HE STARTED TO SCREAM.
--GGGAAAHHH--!
FOR THE FIRST TIME, GALVANE UNDERSTOOD THE TRUE MEANING OF SACRIFICE.
--AAHHUKK!--

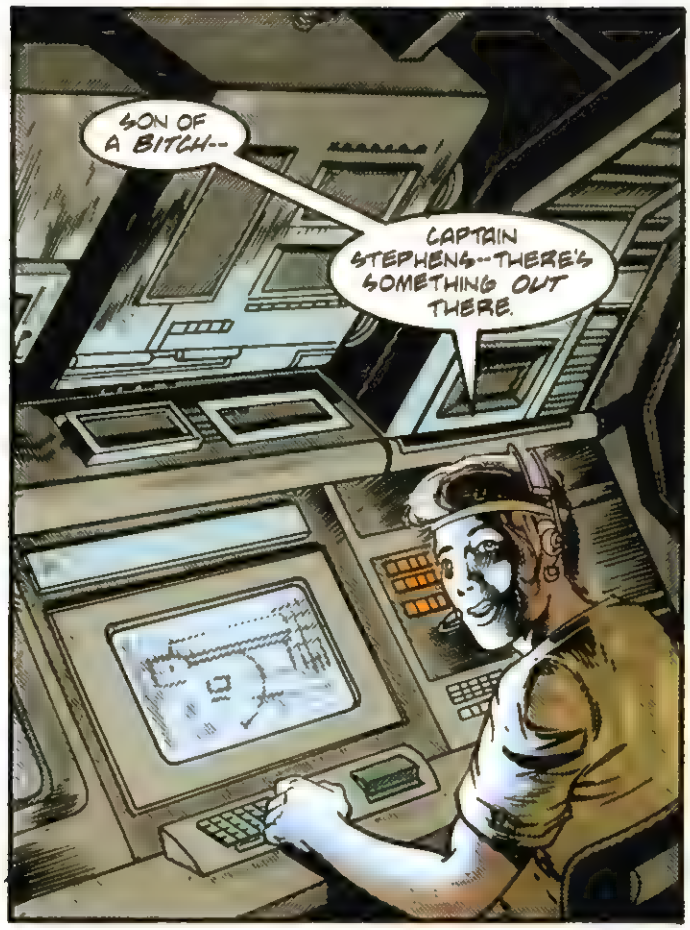
WHA--
MY GOD. THEY'RE TAKING HER.
AGGH!
PLEASE-- TAKE ME-- PLEASE--!
UKGGH--!
THEY'RE TRYING TO DESTROY HER.
SIR--WE'RE UNDER SOME SORT OF ATTACK! I'VE LOST CONTACT WITH GROUND FLOOR SECURITY--
I THINK WE SHOULD NOTIFY THE--
NO OUTSIDERS! WE HANDLE THIS IN-HOUSE--
SALVAJE'S ACOLYTES DRAGGED THEIR INFECTED BRETHEREN OUTSIDE, MAKING ROOM FOR THE OTHERS. I SAW DOZENS TAKE THE SPORE.
THEY WERE ALL HER CHILDREN NOW.

KILLERS! MURDERERS!
THE QUEEN'S MINE!
BLAM BLAM
I HEARD GUNFIRE OUTSIDE THE CHAMBER. SUDDENLY, THE ALIEN SCREAMED.
IT WAS THE CRY OF A MOTHER AT THE DEATH OF HER CHILD.
I BROKE AWAY FROM SALVAJE'S MEN AND STAGGERED BLINDLY THROUGH THE NEST.
THE LIFE-FORM PATENTS BELONG HERE. WE DEVELOPED IT. WE NURTURED IT.
BLAM BLAM
THERE'S TOO MANY OF THEM--WE CAN'T POSSIBLY--
--MOTHER OF--

YOU--YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND-- I'D NEVER HURT YOU--
FHUNK
REINE'S DEAD--YOU'RE ALL I HAVE LEFT OF HIM--
WHACK
UNNNGH!
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND--
--I LOVE YOU--
I ONLY WANT THE BEST FOR YOU--
AAAGGHH!

KOFF KOFF--I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH AFTER THAT. SECURITY POLICE QUARANTINED THE BUILDING--THEY MUST HAVE FOUND ME INSIDE--
I JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND. WHY-- WHY ME--?
OH MY GOD. IT MAKES SENSE NOW. SHE DID IT--THAT THING--
I'VE BEEN PART OF IT ALL ALONG. HOOKING UP SALVAJE, BURNING THE SECURITY STOPS--
KAK KAK--MAYBE IT GOES BACK EVEN FURTHER--BIRTH--SCHOOL. EVERY DECISION OF OF MY LIFE--MAYBE SHE CONTROLLED IT ALL--
IT WASN'T SALVAJE'S CONSPIRACY--IT WAS HERS. I WAS JUST ANOTHER SOLDIER--ANOTHER SACRIFICE--
OH GOD, PLEASE--I'M SCARED OF DYING. I WANT TO LIVE. I WANT TO--
THAT'S ENOUGH. WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HIM?
ORGAN BANK'S TAKING WHAT THEY CAN USE--EYES, SKIN, WHAT'S LEFT OF HIS STOMACH. THEY'LL BURN THE REST.
WE'RE WASTING TIME. WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE THE FANATICS ARE HIDING.
ACCORDING TO BIONATIONAL DOCUMENTATION, ALIEN GESTATION TAKES ANYWHERE FROM 72 HOURS TO A WEEK OR MORE.
IF ANY OF THE NEWBORN ESCAPE--IF ANY OF THEM ARE QUEENS--
GOD HELP US ALL.

AS THE SHIP APPROACHED THE ALIEN'S HOMEWORLD, I WAS OVERWHELMED BY A HIDEOUS PREMONITION OF DEATH.
BUELLER AND I SPENT EVERY SPARE MOMENT TOGETHER. I KNEW HE SHARED MY APPREHENSIONS.
THERE WAS AN AIR OF DESPERATION TO OUR ENCOUNTERS, AS IF WE DIDN'T DARE WASTE AN INSTANT.
WE MADE LOVE THAT FINAL DAY, SURROUNDED BY THE BLEAK GRAY METAL OF THE SHIP'S HULL.
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE RIM, I CRIED.
I REMEMBER THINKING HOW FRAIL WE WERE NEXT TO OUR MACHINES.


SON OF A BITCH--
CAPTAIN STEPHENS--THERE'S SOMETHING OUT THERE.

PERHAPS IT'S--DEBRIS OF SOME KIND?
NO WAY, SIR. IT'S CHANGING COURSE--FOLLOWING US
IT'S SOME SORT OF SHIP.

I'LL SOUND GENERAL QUAR--

BLAM
NO. NOT QUITE YET.

THIS IS STEPHENS. EVERYTHING IS SET. PREPARE FOR DOCKING.

MASSEY HERE. EXCELLENT, EXCELLENT--

--BE SEEING YOU SHORTLY.
WHAT IN THE HELL--
SOMETHING'S HIT US!
JESUS-- CODE FIVE ALERT-- WE'RE UNDER ATTACK--!
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE--! IT MUST BE SOME KIND OF DRILL--! AN ACCIDENT--
YOU'RE SAFE HERE, BILLIE. WAIT FOR ME.
I LOVE YOU--AND I'LL BE BACK.

ANYBODY KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING?
YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE. NOBODY CAN FIND STEPHENS OR WILKS.
WHAT ABOUT JONES?
SHE HAD COMMUNICATIONS DUTY. I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE SHE--
SHIT! SOMEONE'S PULLED THE LOADER MECHANISM! THIS THING'S USELESS!
THIS ONE, TOO.
THEY'VE ALL BEEN ZEROED. THIS IS SOME KIND OF SETUP.
THIS IS CAPTAIN STEPHENS.
I WANT ALL CREW TO REPORT TO THE LOADING BAY-- IMMEDIATELY.

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE GOING TO KILL THE REST OF THEM-- LIKE YOU KILLED EASLEY.
WHAT HAPPENED-- HE CATCH YOU TRANSMITTING TO THESE BASTARDS?
GET OFF IT, WILKS--
YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT THE DAMN "MARINES" ANY MORE THAN I DO. ALL YOU CARE ABOUT ARE YOUR PRECIOUS ALIENS.
THAT'S IT-- NICE AND EASY!
DOUBLE CHECK THE SHIP'S COMPLEMENT. MAKE SURE WE HAVE EVERYONE.
YOUR MARINES ARE SAFE FOR NOW. CORPORAL WILKS. WE STILL NEED AN ALIEN SPECIMEN-- AND THEY SEEM TO THRIVE ON HUMANS.
HUMANS? YOU THINK YOU CAN USE THE MARINES FOR BAIT? CHRIST, DIDN'T THEY--
THAT'S ENOUGH.
I DON'T LIKE YOU, STEPHENS. I DON'T MIND GREEDY MEN--
--BUT I CAN'T COUNTENANCE TRAITORS--EVEN WHEN THEY'RE ON MY SIDE. NEVER KNOW WHEN THEY MIGHT TURN--
WAIT-- MASSEY--YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND-- YOU NEED ME--
POOM!
NOT ANYMORE.
PREPARE THE DROPSHIP FOR LANDING.
WE'RE GOING HUNTING.

FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT I'D FOUND LOVE. ONE OF WILK'S GRUNTS--A MARINE NAMED BUELLER--
WHAT IS IT ABOUT LIFE THAT AS SOON AS YOU FIND SOMETHING GOOD-- IT'S TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU?
I COULD FEEL THE PANIC RISING IN MY CHEST. CHOKING. CLAUSTROPHOBIC.
MY FIRST INSTINCT WAS TO HIDE--JUST LIKE RIM--JUST LIKE EARTH.
THAT'S WHAT THE ENEMY DEPENDS ON. HUMAN--ALIEN--THEY RELY ON THAT FEAR TO ENDURE.
NO!
IT EXPLAINED THE RESILIENCE OF CREATURES LIKE THE ALIEN.
THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND FEAR. THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING BEYOND THEIR OWN EXISTENCE.
I KNEW I WOULD HAVE TO BECOME LIKE THEM TO SURVIVE.

IT HAD BEEN FOUR HOURS SINCE WE'D BEEN BOARDED. WHO THE HELL WERE THEM? SOLDIERS? MERCENARIES?
THIS WAS EASIER THAN I'D HOPED. DID YOU DOUBLE-CHECK THE INBOARD ROSTER?
STEPHENS ACED EASLEY AND JONES AND DUMPED THE BODIES BEFORE WE DOCKED--
THE REST OF THE COMPLEMENT IS ACCOUNTED FOR.
IT DIDN'T MATTER. IT WOULDN'T HAVE MATTERED TO THEM.
NO WONDER STEPHENS CHEWED MY ASS OVER PACKING PLASMA RIFLES. HE WAS AFRAID WE'D USE THEM AGAINST YOU.
I STILL CAN'T FIGURE WHERE THE CORPORATION FOUND THE BALLS TO INTERCEPT A GOVERNMENT SHIP ON A CLASSIFIED MISSION--
I THINK YOU'LL FIND THE CORPORATION CAPABLE OF ALMOST ANYTHING.
WE STILL BELIEVE IN FREE ENTERPRISE-- CAPITALISM. AND I'M AFRAID YOUR GOVERNMENT WANTS TO KEEP THE ALIEN LIFEFORM FOR ITSELF.
MY GOVERNMENT? YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE THE CORPORATION IS AN INDEPENDENT STATE--
JESUS. THOSE THINGS DESTROYED RIM. THINK WHAT THEY COULD DO ON EARTH--
I HAVE.
WE'RE BREEDING THEM.

YOU'LL STAY WITH ME ABOARD THE BENEDICT. YOUR MEN SEEM TO RESPECT YOU-- I MIGHT BE ABLE TO *USE* THAT--

YOU'VE ALREADY GOT THOSE THINGS ON EARTH--WHY NOT JUST *KILL* US AND BE DONE WITH IT?

OH, BUT YOU'RE *GOING* TO DIE--REST ASSURED OF THAT.

BUT I'M SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE CALL OF SCIENCE.

WE'RE CHARGED WITH *INVESTIGATING* THE HOMEWORLD BEFORE RETURNING TO EARTH.

"NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU MIGHT FIND. IF THEIR HOMEWORLD FOLLOWS TRADITIONAL PATTERNS, THERE'S PROBABLY SOME SORT OF ECOLOGICAL *BALANCE*.

"PREDATOR. PREY. LIKE EARTH--LIKE *YOU* AND *ME*.

"THE ALIEN IS A REMARKABLE LIFEFORM, BUT IT MAY NOT BE THE *DOMINANT* SPECIES ON ITS HOMEWORLD.

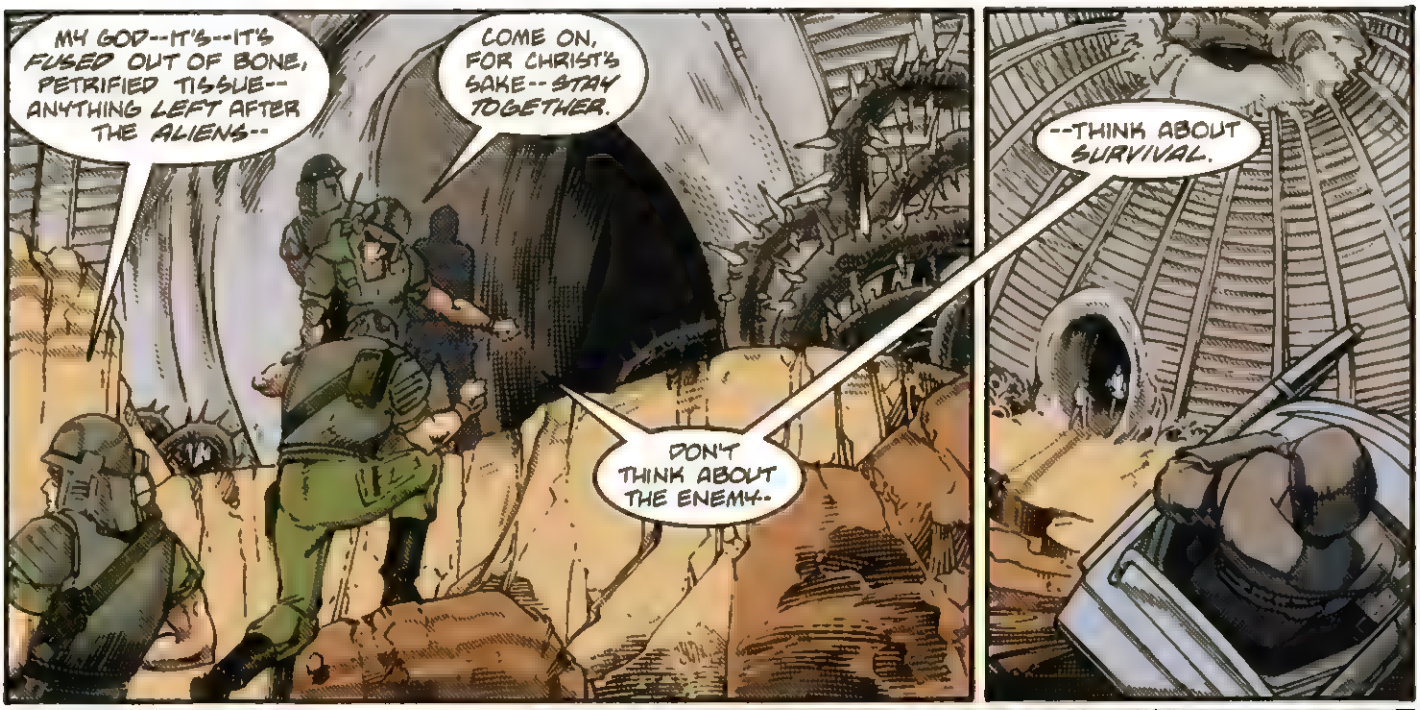
"A CORPORATION LIKE BIONATIONAL SUCCEEDS BY STAYING ONE STEP IN FRONT OF THE COMPETITION. IN FIVE YEARS THE ALIEN WILL BE OBSOLETE--*PASSÉ*. WE'LL NEED TO FIND NEWER, SUPERIOR BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS.

"WE'RE FISHING. YOUR MARINES ARE *BAIT*."

WE'RE PICKING UP SOME BURN ON THE OUTER HULL--GROUND SCANNERS ARE STARTING TO CLEAR--
JE-SUS, MASSEY--ARE YOU SEEING THIS?
YEAH. PUT DOWN NEAR THE FORMATION AND DISPATCH THE FLOATERS.
MAKE SURE ALL THE DATA RECORDERS ARE UP--THEY'RE GOING TO WANT THIS ON DISC.
THEN DROP THE MARINES AND ENJOY THE SHOW.
THE ATMOSPHERE'S MARGINAL, BUT THERE ARE ONLY ENOUGH MASKS FOR US GOOD GUYS. HELL, THOUGH, YOU'RE ROUGH, TOUGH MARINES.
YOU CAN HANDLE IT--
I STILL DON'T LIKE THIS.
COME ON--YOU READ THE DOCUMENTATION. THE ADULTS ARE A BITCH, BUT THEY'RE GROUND BASED.
ONCE THE CRABLIKE THINGS ATTACH TO A HOST, THEY GO DORMANT. WE PICK THEM UP, WE GO HOME. NO PROBLEM.
YEAH, RIGHT--NO PROBLEM.

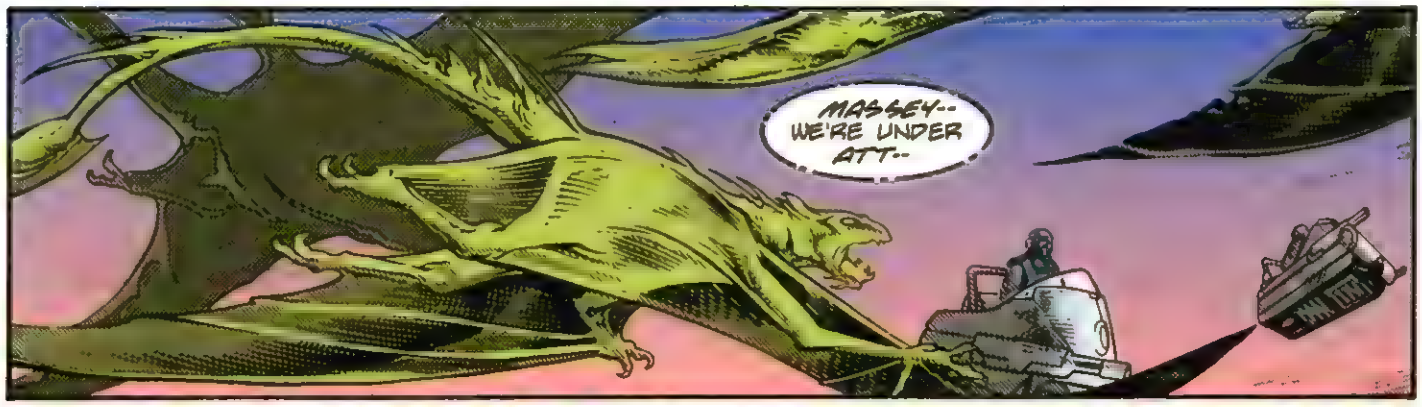
I KNEW I WOULD HAVE TO KILL THEM.
THE DUCTS WORMED THROUGH THE SHIP, SEPARATED BY AN INTRICATE NETWORK OF AUTOMATIC INTERIOR DOORS.
THE ALIENS USED SIMILAR TUNNELS TO ATTACK US ON RIM.
SOMEBODY PULLED THE LOADERS FROM THE MARINES' BLASTERS. PROBABLY THAT PIECE OF SHIT, STEPHENS.
I SAW WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIM SPATTERED DOWN IN THE LOADING BAY. SAVED *ME* THE TROUBLE.
THE INTRUDERS WERE CALM, CONFIDENT THAT THEY WERE IN COMPLETE CONTROL. DESPITE SO MANY WARNINGS, WILKS AND HIS MARINES MADE A SIMILAR MISTAKE ON RIM.
IT WAS A MATTER OF *PERCEPTION*. THE ALIENS WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD.
THE BENEDICT DIDN'T BELONG TO THOSE BASTARDS IN THE LOADING BAY. IT BELONGED TO *ME*.
I COULDN'T IMAGINE STEPHENS ACTUALLY JETTISONING THE LOADERS--HE WAS TOO *PRUDENT* FOR THAT.

DOES THIS MAKE ANY SENSE TO YOU? BIONATIONAL--THE GOVERNMENT--WE'RE ALL SUPPOSED TO BE ON THE SAME SIDE.
THERE'RE NO SIDES ANYMORE--JUST MONEY--
--AND WE'RE EXPENDABLE.
CHRIST--I'M GETTING BARE NOMINALS ON ATMOSPHERE, AND THE GRUNTS ARE HARDLY AFFECTED--
THEY'RE ACTING LIKE IT'S ANOTHER DAY IN BOOT CAMP--
MAYBE THEY BELIEVE ALL THAT "WE'RE THE BEST" RECRUITING SHIT--
--BUT THEY DON'T LOOK SO MEAN FROM HERE--
--AND HELL, WE'VE GOT THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE.

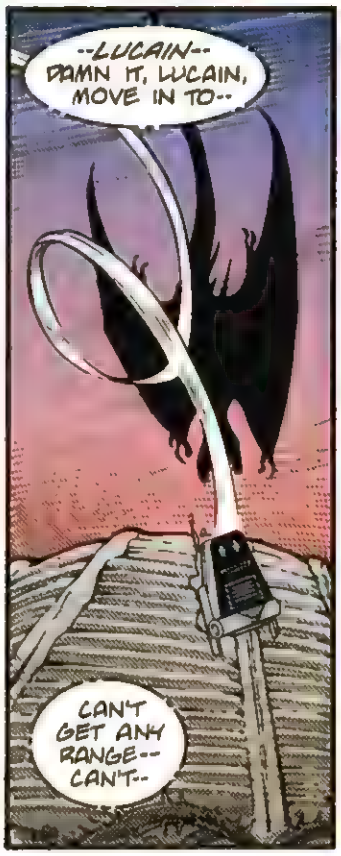

MY GOD--IT'S--IT'S FUSED OUT OF BONE, PETRIFIED TISSUE--ANYTHING LEFT AFTER THE ALIENS--
COME ON, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE--STAY TOGETHER.
DON'T THINK ABOUT THE ENEMY--
--THINK ABOUT SURVIVAL.

SURVIVAL? THAT'S FUNNY, MAN.
WHERE THE HELL ARE THEY? WHY DON'T THEY ATTACK?
--HOLD IT.

ARE YOU CRAZY--? BACK OFF!
THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE--SOMETHING MOVING--BUT IT'S NOT ATTACKING...
WHY ARE WE STILL ALIVE?
SOMETHING'S WRONG.
SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THIS ENTIRE MISSION--


MASSEY-- WE'RE UNDER ATT--

REGROUP! GET BACK TO TH-- *SSSZZZZ*
GGAHHH--
THE SKY'S FULL OF THEM--JESUS, MASSEY, WE NEED--


--LUCAIN-- DAMN IT, LUCAIN, MOVE IN TO--
CAN'T GET ANY RANGE-- CAN'T--

--I SEE SMOKE-- HAINES IS DOWN--
BACK OFF! BACK OFF!

GO! GO! GO!

LUCAIN AND HAINES ARE BOTH DEAD--THOSE THINGS ARE--
YOU SON OF A BITCH, MASSEY-- WE NEED HELP!

OH MY GOD--
THIS IS WHERE THEY BREED--

WHERE THEY--

--UKKKK--
BRAAAP

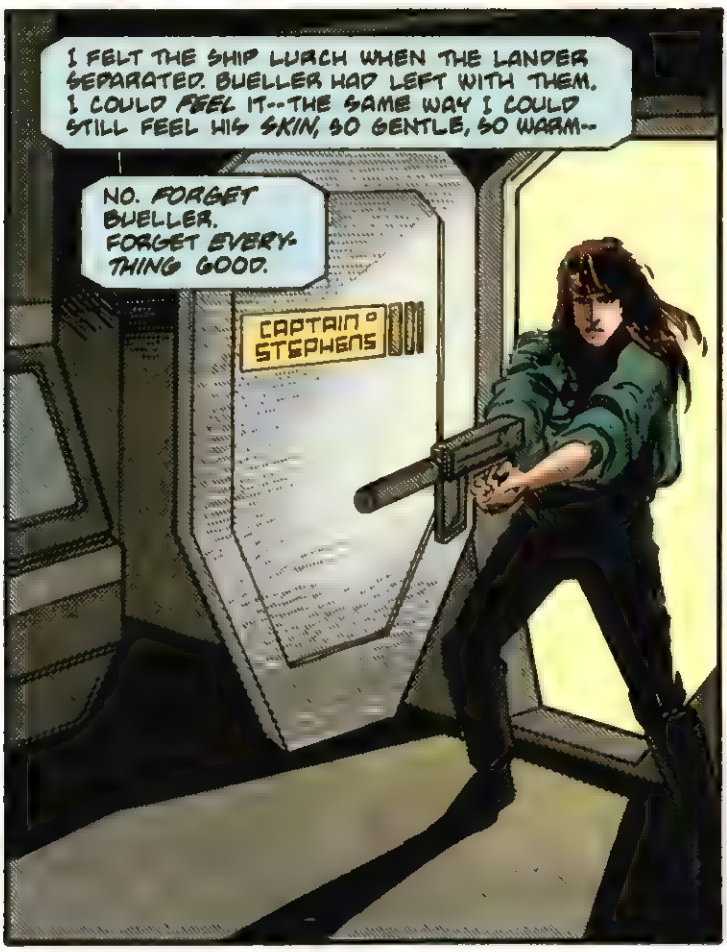
OH JESUS--THEY'RE EVERYWHERE--
BRAAP BRAAP

I THINK I SEE AN OPENING-- WE MIGHT--
DAMN-- WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

FOOM!
FOOM!
FOOM!
SOUNDS LIKE GUNFIRE--

CRAA UN CH!
UMPGH!

LET'S GET THE GUNS FROM THE LANDER!


I FELT THE SHIP LURCH WHEN THE LANDER SEPARATED. BUELLER HAD LEFT WITH THEM. I COULD FEEL IT--THE SAME WAY I COULD STILL FEEL HIS SKIN, SO GENTLE, SO WARM--
NO. FORGET BUELLER. FORGET EVERYTHING GOOD.
CAPTAIN STEPHENS

THE ALIENS DIDN'T NEED LOVE. LONELINESS--FEAR--THE CONCEPTS WERE MEANINGLESS.
THEY ONLY KNEW DEATH. IT KEPT THINGS SIMPLE.
KA-CHUNK

THEY'RE ALL AROUND US-- JESUS CHRIST, WE'RE SURROUNDED--
CAN BARELY BREATHE--MASSEY-- YOU BASTARD--DO SOMETHING--
SCREW IT.
YOUR MARINES ARE GOOD. GETTING AWAY FROM THE HIVE, OVERPOWERING MY PEOPLE--I MAY HAVE UNDERESTIMATED YOU--
CLICK
3:00:00
REMOTE LANDER DESTRUCT
THE SCIENTISTS WILL RAISE A FUSS OVER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INBOARD DOCUMENTATION.
BUT THEY'LL GET OVER IT.
WHAT ABOUT YOUR MEN?
WHAT ABOUT THEM?
MY PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE WAS TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT FROM SECURING AN ALIEN SPECIMEN. MISSION ACCOM--
DROP IT, YOU SON OF A BITCH.

WELL. WE SEEM TO HAVE MISSED ONE.
WHAT ARE YOU? SHIP'S MASCOT?
RELEASE WILKS. NOW.
THE ALIEN WOULD HAVE ATTACKED. WHAT WAS WRONG WITH ME? WHY COULDN'T I FIRE?
I-- I SAID RELEASE HIM.
YOU'RE VERY PRETTY. YOU CAN'T BE ONE OF THESE HARD-ASS MARINES.
I'LL BET YOU'VE NEVER EVEN FIRED ONE OF THOSE TH--
SHOOT HIM, BILLIE!
DON'T. DON'T COME ANY CLOSER--
YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO KILL ME, HONEY.
HOW COULD YOU LIVE WITH YOURSELF-- MURDERING ANOTHER HUMAN BEING--?
IT WASN'T FAIR. I WANTED TO BE JUST LIKE THEM.
STAY BA--
GOD HELP ME. I WAS ONLY HUMAN.

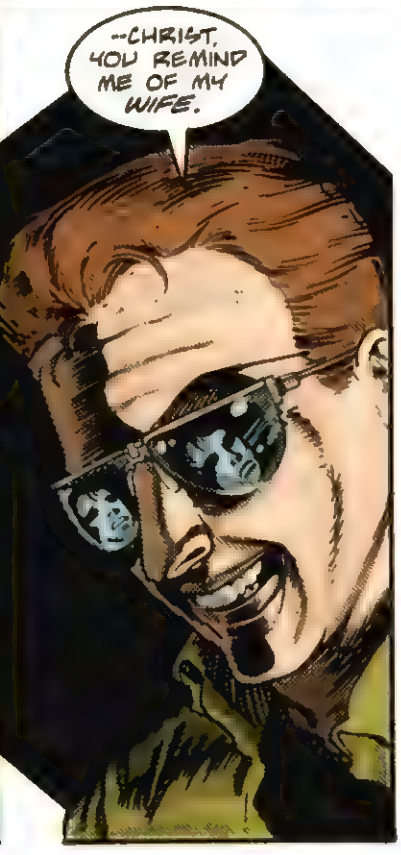
--YOU STUPID BITCH--

--TRY TO USE A WEAPON AGAINST ME-- CHRIST--
WHUMP!
UNGHH!

I DON'T NEED WEAPONS. I COULD OPEN YOUR THROAT WITH MY FINGERS--FEEL THE BLOOD SPRAY DOWN MY ARMS--

--BUT YOU'RE NOT WORTH THE EFFORT.

YOU'RE NOTHING-- A DISTRACTION--


--CHRIST, YOU REMIND ME OF MY WIFE.

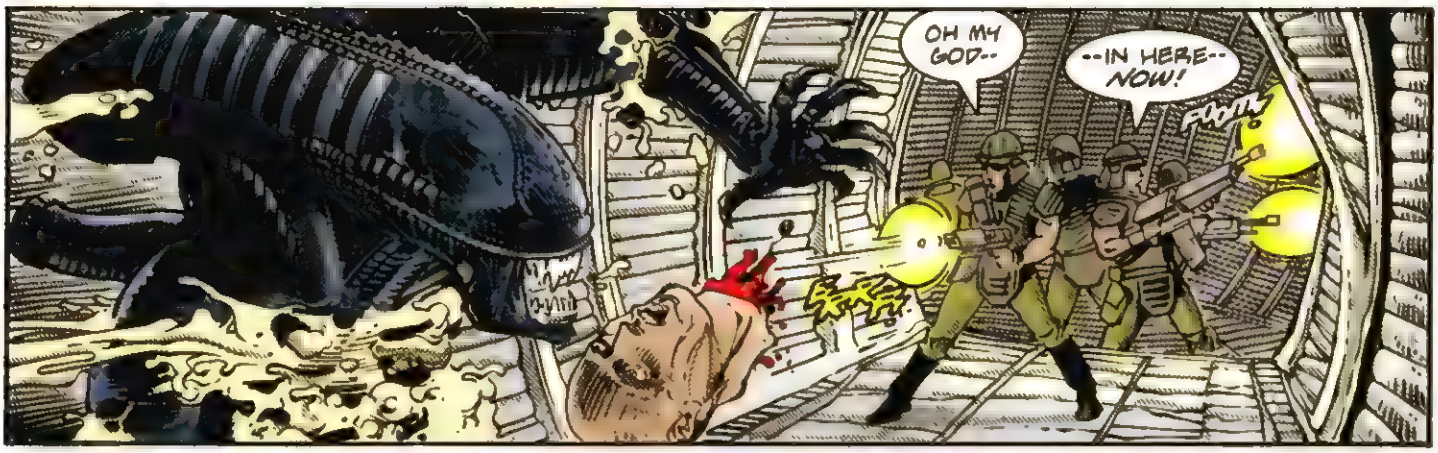
NOOOO--!
BILLIE--RUN!
BAM BAM BAM BAM
I'M THROUGH RUNNING.
POOM!
AAGGHHH--!
I WAS WRONG. I WASN'T LIKE THE ALIEN--NOTHING TRULY HUMAN COULD STAND SUCH EMPTINESS.
COH--YOU DON'T SCARE ME, BITCH. NOTHING SCARES ME.
SHIT. YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE THE STRENGTH TO--
I THOUGHT OF BUELLER. I THOUGHT OF OUR LOVE.
WRONG.
POOM!

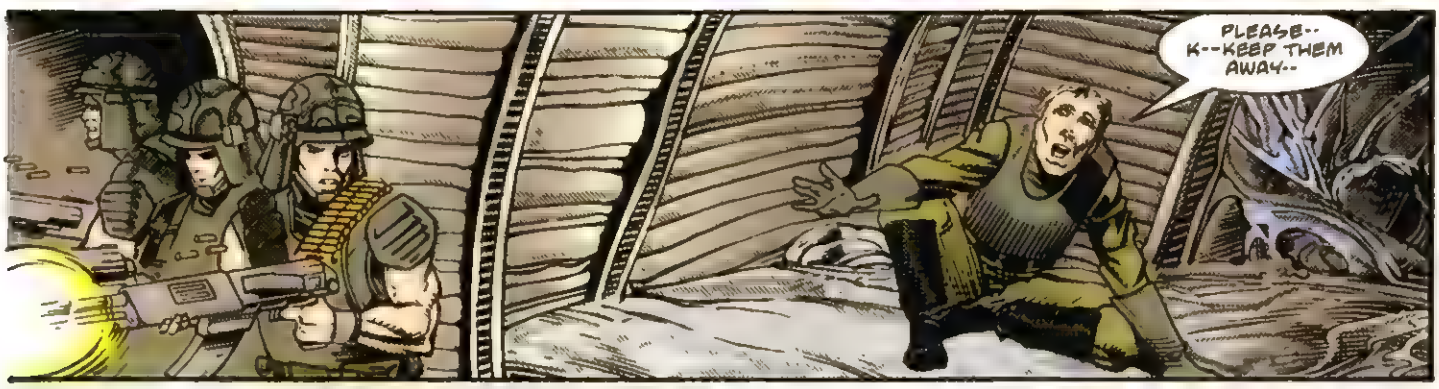
CAN'T YOU STOP IT?
THERE'S NO TIME, DAMN IT-
0:15:22
ARMED
BUELLER-- THIS IS BILLIE-- YOU HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM THE LANDER-- NOW!
BA-WUDAMM!
DOWN!
AUTO ALL THE CONTROLS. EVERYTHING. WE'LL HAVE TO TRANSFER THE BENEDICT'S NUKES TO THEIR LANDER AND SET THEM OURSELVES.
I DON'T CARE WHAT IT TAKES. I'M GOING TO FINISH IT.
BUELLER--LISTEN TO ME. WE'RE GOING TO USE THE INTRUDER'S LANDER TO RECOVER YOU.
FIND SOMEWHERE SAFE TO WAIT FOR--
WE CAN'T WAIT--
WE MANAGED TO SALVAGE THE BLASTERS AND AMMUNITION FROM THE LANDER. WE'RE GOING BACK TO THE HIVE.

THE HIVE?
YOU--YOU CAN'T-- THOSE THINGS--
WE HAVE TO-- WE ALREADY LOST STEPHENS-- THOSE MEN IN THE LANDER. WE CAN'T LET ANYONE ELSE DIE.
WHAT IS THIS? SOME TEST OF MARINE COURAGE?
STEPHENS WAS A TRAITOR! THOSE MEN WERE GOING TO KILL YOU! PLEASE--
I'M BEGGING YOU--
WAIT FOR ME--!
YOU'RE WASTING TIME. FORGET THEM.
THEY WERE DEAD BEFORE THE MISSION BEGAN--
I-- I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT--
WE HAVE TO GO BACK--
I LOVE YOU, BILLIE.

WE LAUNCHED MASSEY'S LANDER AND BEGAN THE SLOW DESCENT TO THE ALIEN'S HOMEWORLD.
I COULD SEE BUELLER OVER THE SHIP'S MONITORS.
HIS FACE WAS REDUCED TO AN ABSTRACT BLUR--TINY ELECTRIC PULSES OF LIGHT AND COLOR.
WILKS IGNORES THE SCREENS, LOST IN HIS DREAMS OF VENGEANCE. AT LEAST HE STILL HAD THAT.
I HAD NOTHING.
THERE WERE NO DREAMS LEFT FOR ME--
SHORT BURSTS, DAMN IT! CONSERVE YOUR FIRE--!
MOTION SENSORS ARE OFF THE SCALE-- THEY'RE ALL OVER US--!
BRRAT
FOOM FOOM
--JUST THE STARK REALITY OF THE ALIEN--
BRRAT
MOVE IT!

--THE STARK REALITY OF DEATH--
I'M READING PLUS-200 ROUNDS, BUELLER--WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME!
THEY'RE CONVERGING AHEAD--AS IF THEY'RE SWARMING OVER SOME--
BRRP!
POOM
BLAM!


OH MY GOD--
--IN HERE--NOW!
FWIIIP

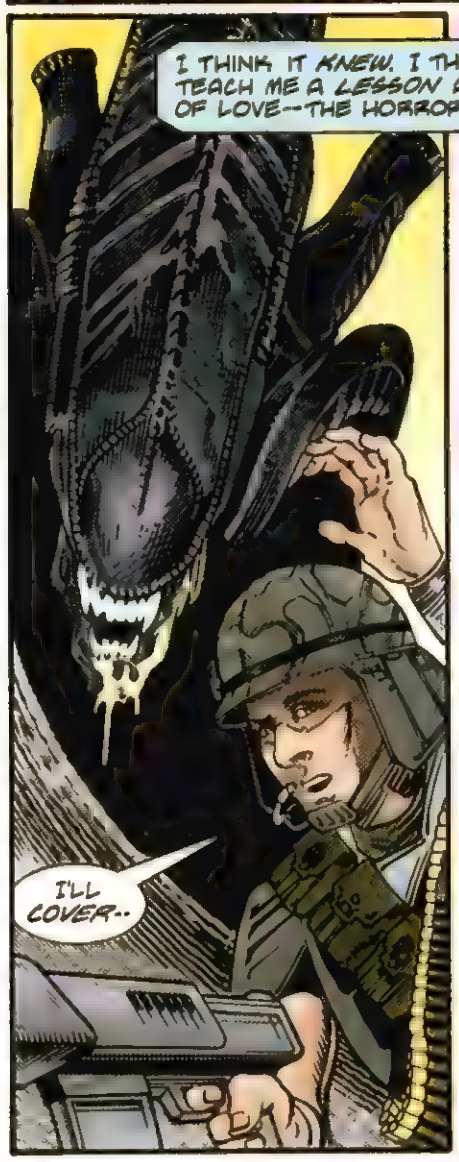

PLEASE--K--KEEP THEM AWAY--

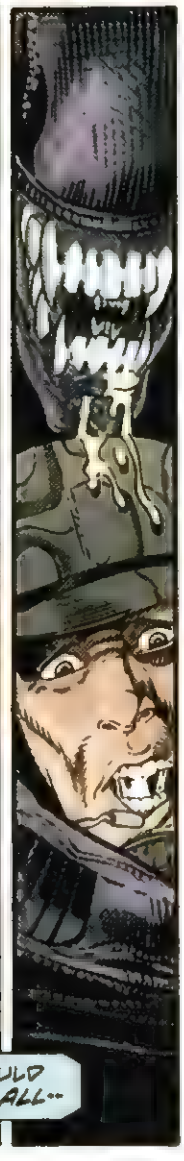
THE REST ARE DEAD. BURN THESE ALIEN BASTARDS AND THEN BACK OUT--
BLAM BLAM BLAM

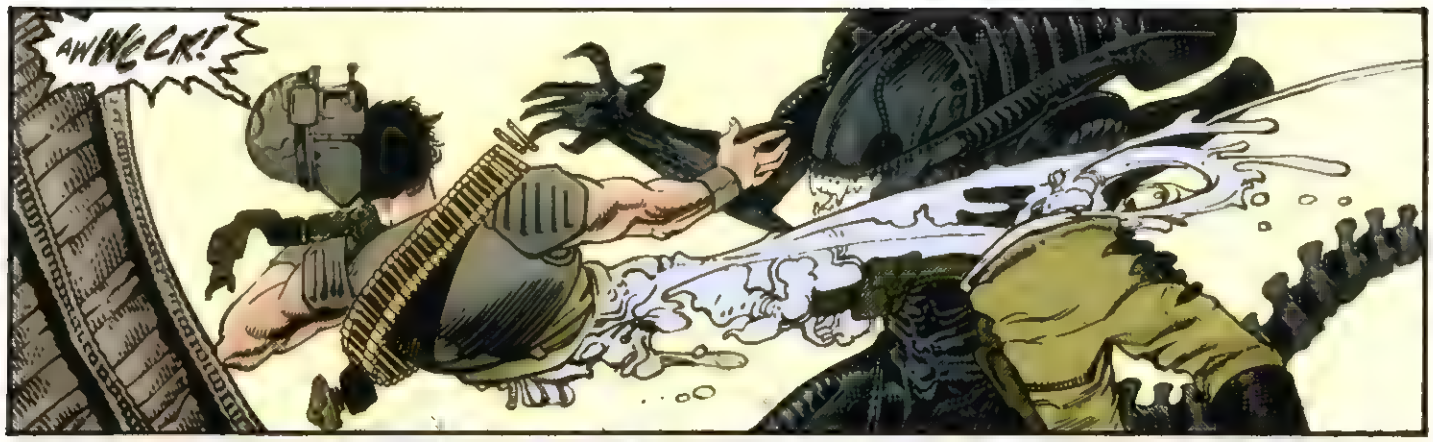
--MAYBE ONE OR TWO OF US WILL ACTUALLY MAKE IT IN ONE PIECE--

WILKS DROPPED THE LANDER JUST OUTSIDE THE ALIEN HIVE. SAND AND DUST DANCED AROUND THE SHIP LIKE SOME MOCKING, ETHEREAL SMOKE--

--LIKE PHOSPHORESCENT SWIRLS OF COLOR FLICKERING ACROSS THE LANDER'S FORWARD MONITOR.
DAMN IT, BUELLER, DON'T FALL BACK--!
JUST KEEP MOVING--


I THINK IT KNEW. I THINK IT WANTED TO TEACH ME A LESSON ABOUT THE FUTILITY OF LOVE--THE HORROR OF TRUST--
I'LL COVER--

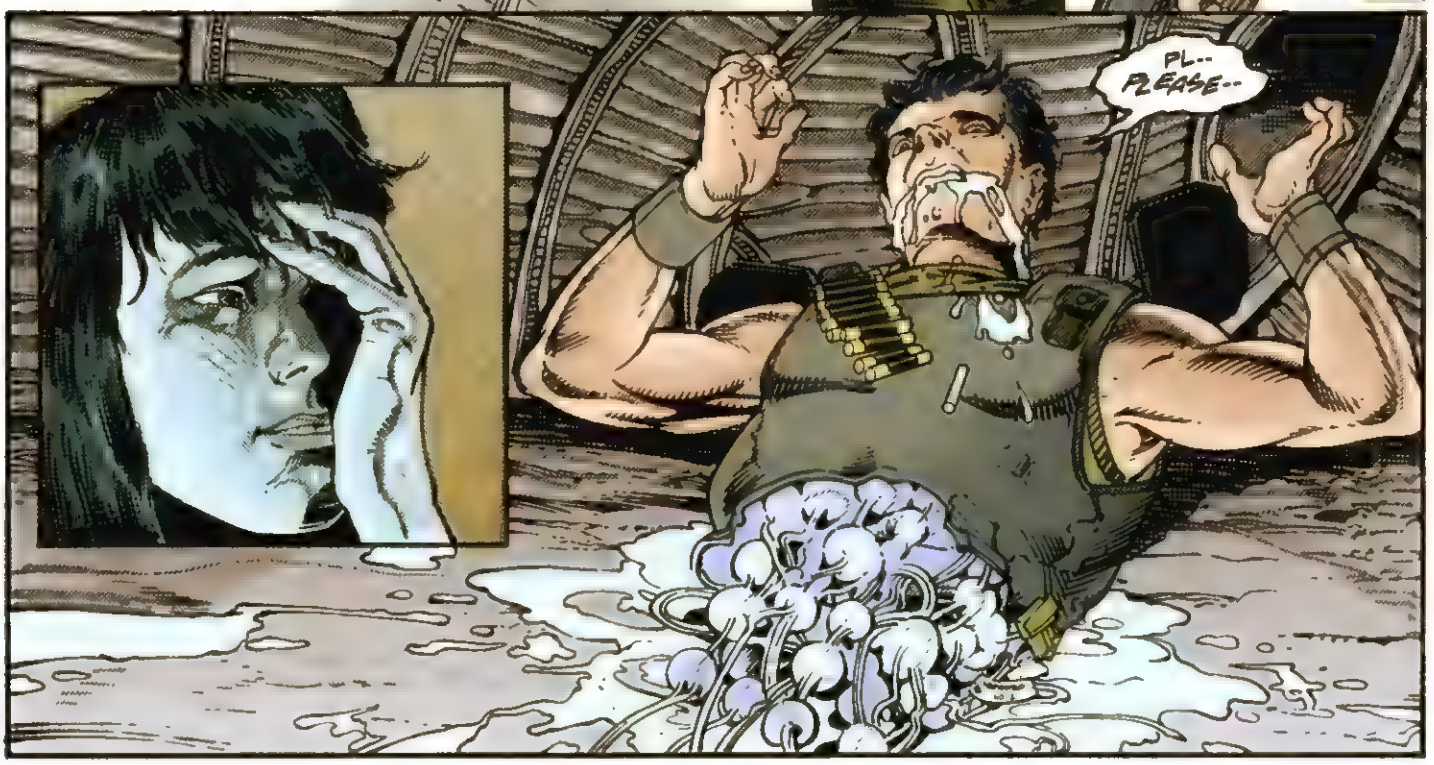

--I COULD SEE IT ALL--


AWWCK!

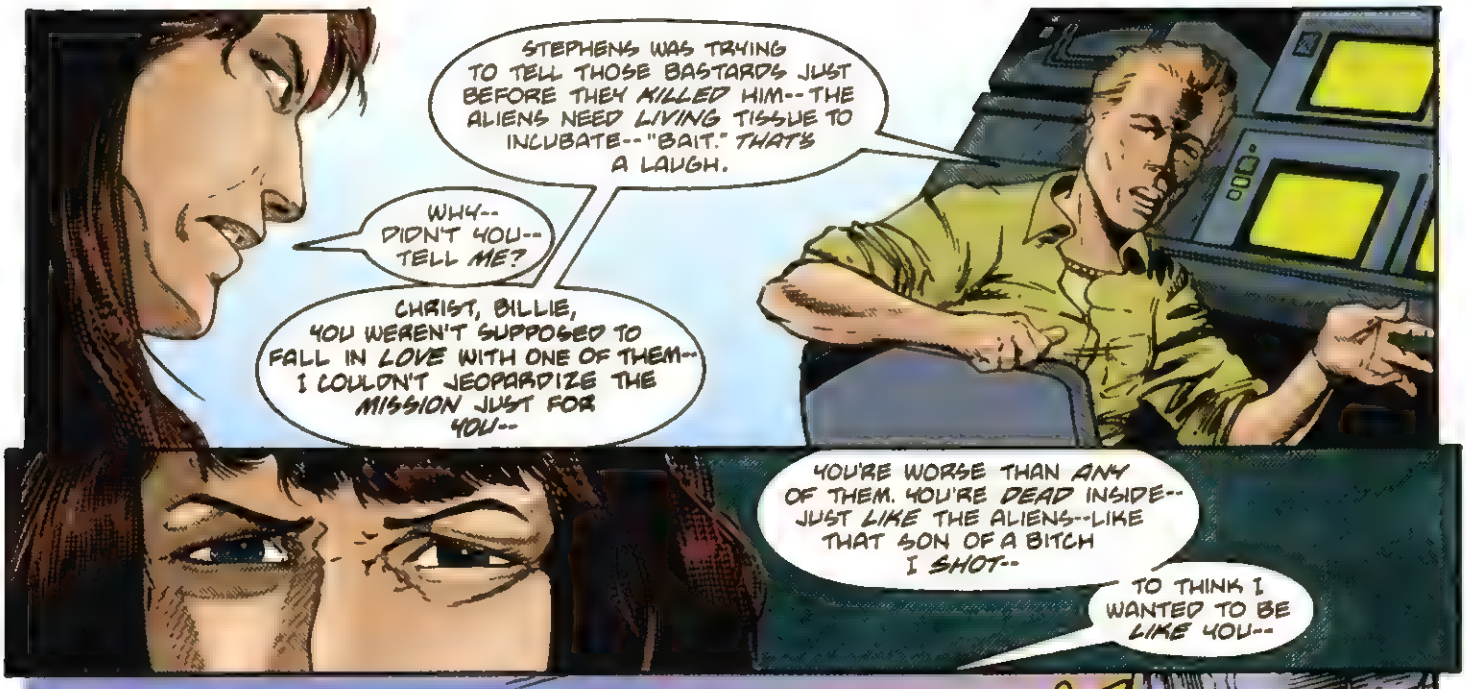
POOTH
POOTH
BRAAAAAP!
POOTH
SCREEEE!

GOD--
NOOOOO!

JESUS,
HE--HE'S
STILL
ALIVE--


PL--
PLEASE--

AGGGGHHH--
BILLIE--STOP IT!
DAMN IT, BILLIE--I TRIED TO KEEP YOU AWAY FROM HIM--FROM ALL OF THEM--
WHY DO YOU THINK THEY WENT BACK FOR THOSE BASTARDS IN THE HIVE? THEIR PRINCIPAL FUNCTION IS TO PRESERVE LIFE. HUMAN LIFE.
THEY WERE--ENGINEERED-- JUST FOR THIS MISSION. SPENT THEIR WHOLE LIVES LOCKED INSIDE THAT MARINE COMPOUND, WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT.
THEY'RE COST EFFICIENT AND EXPENDABLE. YOU, ME, STEVENS--WE WERE THE ONLY HUMANS ON BOARD.
THERE WERE INTERACTION PROBLEMS WITH EARLIER MODELS--HUMANS JUST DIDN'T LIKE THEM, SO THESE PROTOTYPES WERE DESIGNED TO SOCIALIZE--THEY EAT LIKE US, TALK LIKE US--
DAMNED PROGRAMMERS WERE ALMOST TOO CLEVER. THE ANDROIDS DEVELOPED SENSITIVITIES. THERE WERE QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR EMOTIONAL STABILITY--HOW THEY'D REACT TO THE TRUTH--
--SO WE TREATED THEM AS EQUALS--PLAYED ALONG WITH THE DECEPTION--


STEPHENS WAS TRYING TO TELL THOSE BASTARDS JUST BEFORE THEY KILLED HIM--THE ALIENS NEED LIVING TISSUE TO INCUBATE--"BAIT." THAT'S A LAUGH.
WHY--DIDN'T YOU--TELL ME?
CHRIST, BILLIE, YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH ONE OF THEM--I COULDN'T JEOPARDIZE THE MISSION JUST FOR YOU--
YOU'RE WORSE THAN ANY OF THEM. YOU'RE DEAD INSIDE--JUST LIKE THE ALIENS--LIKE THAT SON OF A BITCH I SHOT--
TO THINK I WANTED TO BE LIKE YOU--

BILLIE--
PLOW!
PLOW!

GET INSIDE AND LOCK DOWN--
HURRY--!
PLOW!
PLOW!
PLOW!

WILKS--THE HATCH IS SEALED--EVERYONE'S ABOARD--
FORGET THE ALIENS--WE HAVE TO LAUNCH!
KA-CHUNK!

--NOT UNTIL I SET THE WARHEADS--

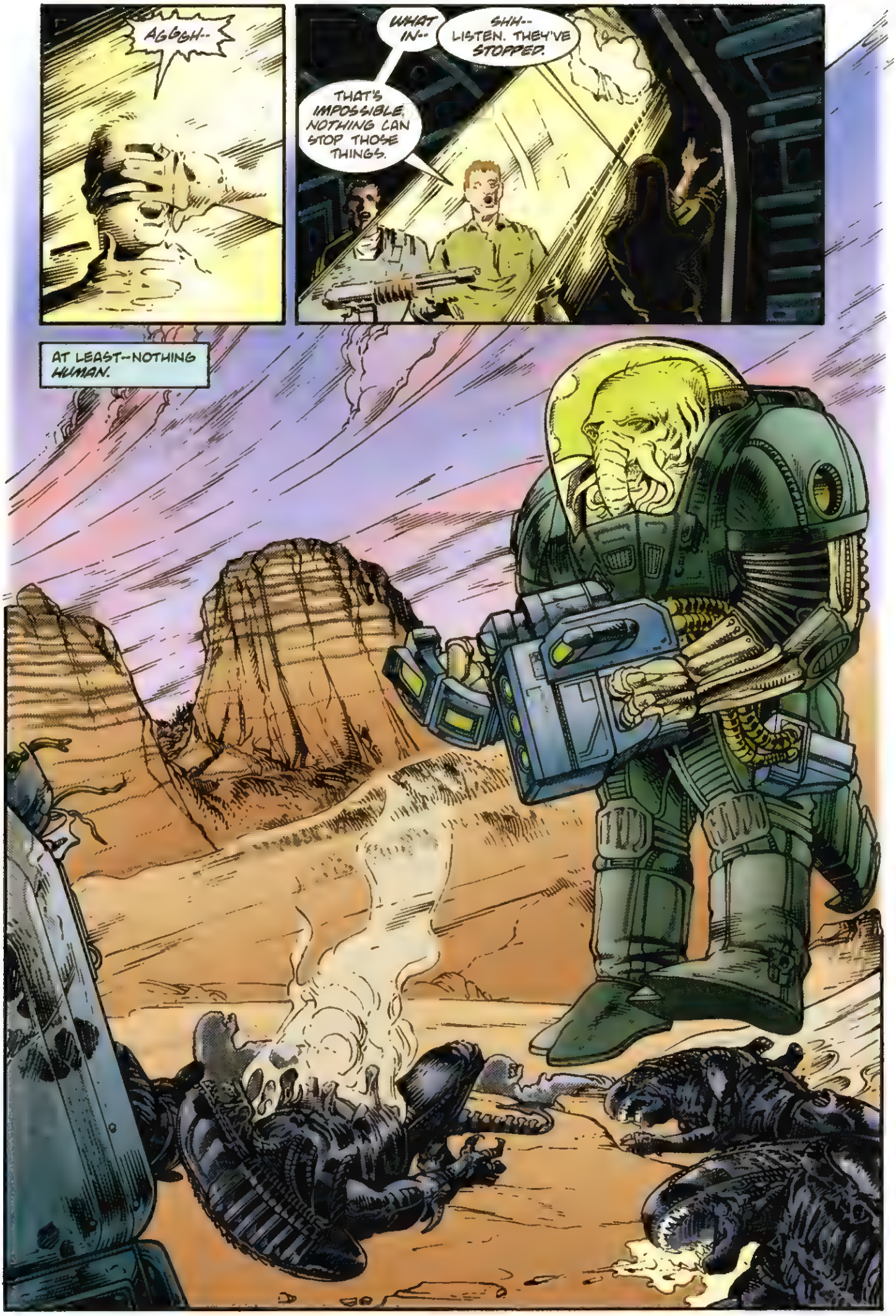
KA-TKUCHAP!
OH MY GOD. THEY'RE OUTSIDE--CRAWLING ACROSS THE HULL--
THEY WANT IN.
SHIT! THEY'VE CUT THE EXTERNAL FEED--
EXTERNALS CONTROL THE TELEMETRY AND LAUNCH FUNCTIONS--
LOOKS LIKE NOBODY'S GOING ANYWHERE.
KA CHUNK!

DON'T-- DON'T LOOK AT ME--
YOU MUST HAVE KNOWN. HOW COULD YOU-- WE-- HAVE--

DOES IT MATTER? DOES ANYTHING MATTER ANYMORE?
JUST DON'T-- LEAVE ME-- LET ME PRETEND A FEW MORE SECONDS--

YEAH-- COME TO PAPA, YOU SON OF A BITCH--
SCRREEEEEK

SAVE IT FOR THE REST OF US--
--I'LL DIE BEFORE I LET THEM TOUCH ME AG--


AGGGH--
WHAT IN--
SHH-- LISTEN. THEY'VE STOPPED.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. NOTHING CAN STOP THOSE THINGS.
AT LEAST--NOTHING HUMAN.

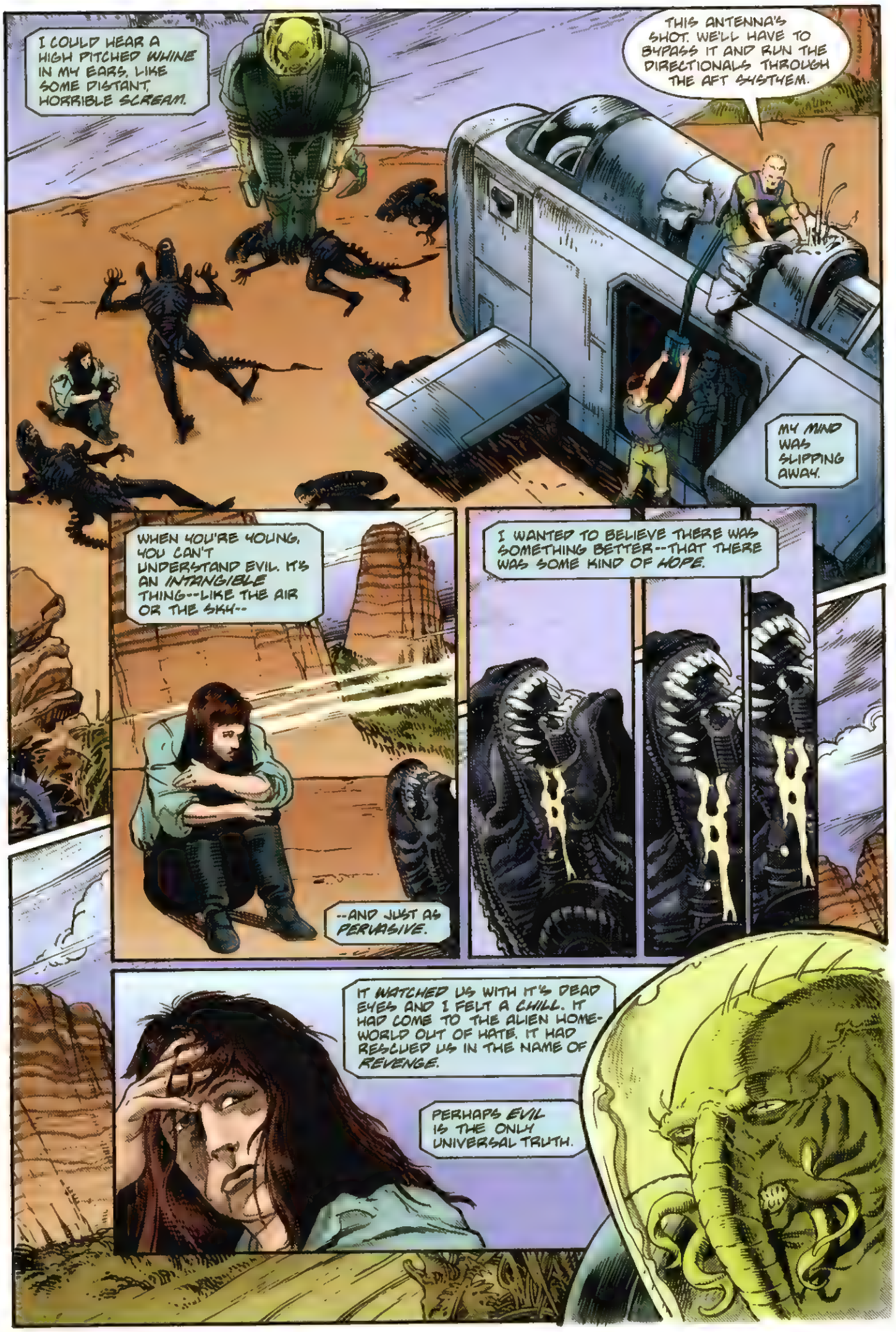
IT HAD DEAD EYES, SEEING AND NOT SEEING.
IT HAD DESTROYED THE ALIENS, BUT NOT FOR US. NEVER FOR US.
WHY?
IT DIDN'T SPEAK, BUT SOMETHING EXPLODED INSIDE MY HEAD, BRIGHT LIKE A MILLION SUNS--
THE IMAGES BOILED UP FROM SOME DEEPER PLACE, THE SAME PLANE AS PRIMAL INSTINCT-- HUNGER, PAIN, FEAR--
--HATRED.
BILLIE--!
I-- CAN-- SEE--

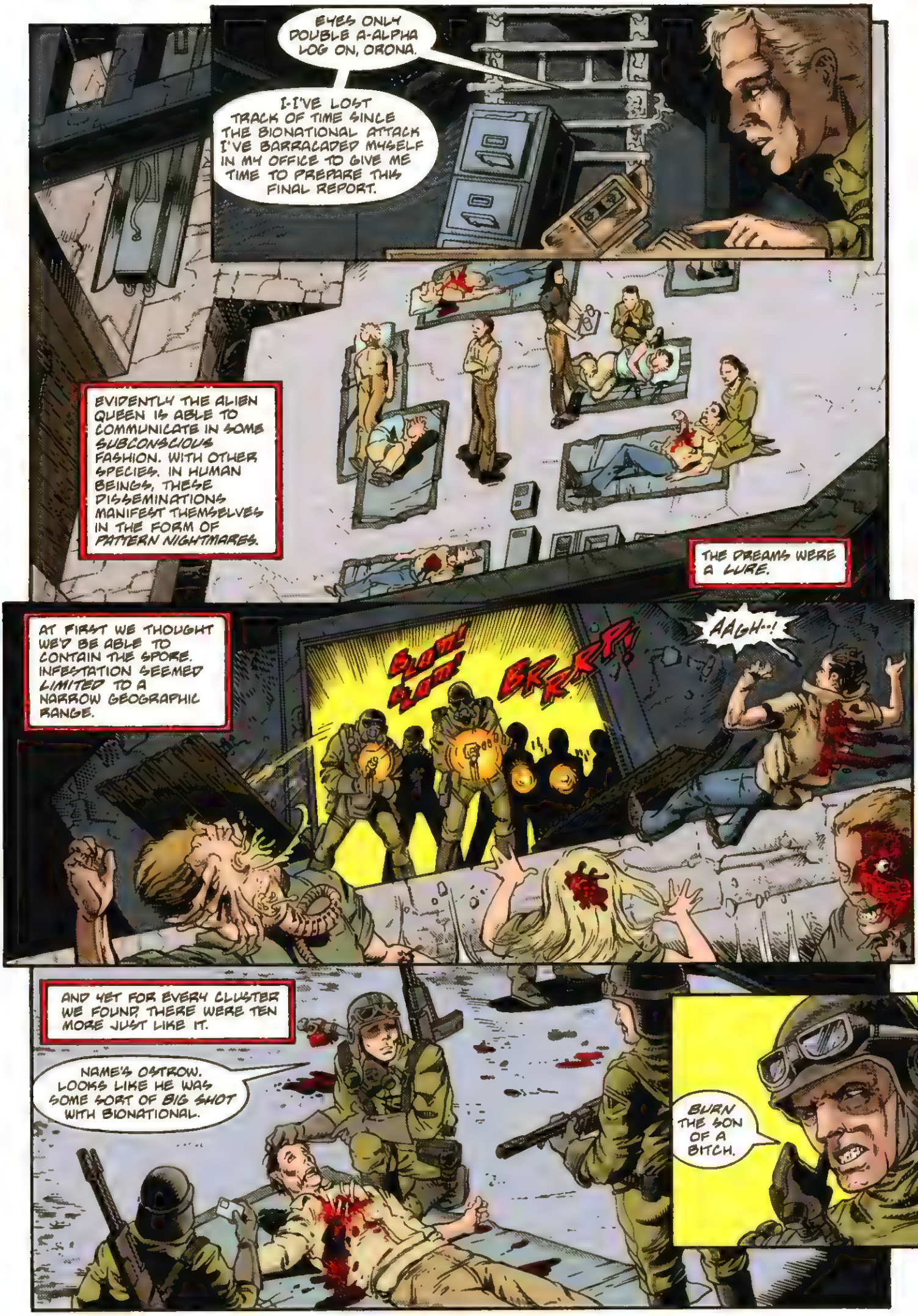
MY NAME IS BILLIE. I'M SIX YEARS OLD. I LIVE ON A WORLD CALLED RIM.
THERE ARE 159 OF US ON THE PLANET. THE CORPORATION CALLS US TERRAFORMERS. MY FATHER CALLS US PIONEERS.
THE CORPORATION HAD SENT US OUT TO INVESTIGATE SOME SORT OF MAGNETIC SURGE. I CAN STILL REMEMBER MY FATHER'S SMILE--THE SCENT OF MY MOTHER'S PERFUME--
THE READINGS ARE GOING OFF SCALE-- WE MUST HAVE FOUND THE MOTHER LODE--!
--AND YOU KNOW THE RULES-- WE FIND IT, WE KEEP IT.
--MY GOD.
HARD TO BELIEVE SOMETHING THIS BIG--WITH THIS KIND OF RESONANCE--WENT WITHOUT BEING NOTICED--
IT'S PARTLY SHELTERED BY NATURAL ROCK FORMATIONS--AND THE DAMNED EC-SATS NEVER WORKED UP TO SPEC--
WHAT'S IT MATTER? IT'S OURS NOW.

MY NAME'S BILLIE--I--I'M NOT SIX YEARS OLD--JESUS, IT WAS ALL SO LONG AGO. I DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER. DON'T MAKE ME REMEMBER.
WIND'S REALLY KICKING UP--WE'LL MAKE A QUICK LOOP TO SECURE THE CLAIM, THEN HEAD BACK--
YOU KIDS STAY INSIDE I MEAN IT--NO FOOLING AROUND.
YOU CAN WATCH OVER THE MONITOR, BUT DON'T TOUCH.
I CAN'T STAND TO SEE IT HAPPEN AGAIN.
--MY GOD, RUSS--IT'S ENORMOUS--
OVER HERE--LOOKS LIKE SOME SORT OF GASH IN THE HULL--
I WAS ONLY SIX YEARS OLD. THE DISCOVERY OF THE DERELICT DIDN'T REALLY MEAN ANYTHING TO ME.
--THIS IS INCREDIBLE--EVERYTHING'S SMOOTH, ALMOST ORGANIC--
WE HAD TERRAFORMED A BARREN ROCK INTO A VIABLE, LIFE-SUSTAINING PLANET.
WE HAD BATTLED TIME, SPACE, THE ELEMENTS--AND WON. WE WEREN'T AFRAID.
--SARAH--IN HERE--!
THAT CAME LATER.
MAYBE THAT THING IN THE DERELICT SHARED OUR BLIND ARROGANCE--
--UNTIL THE ALIENS KILLED IT.

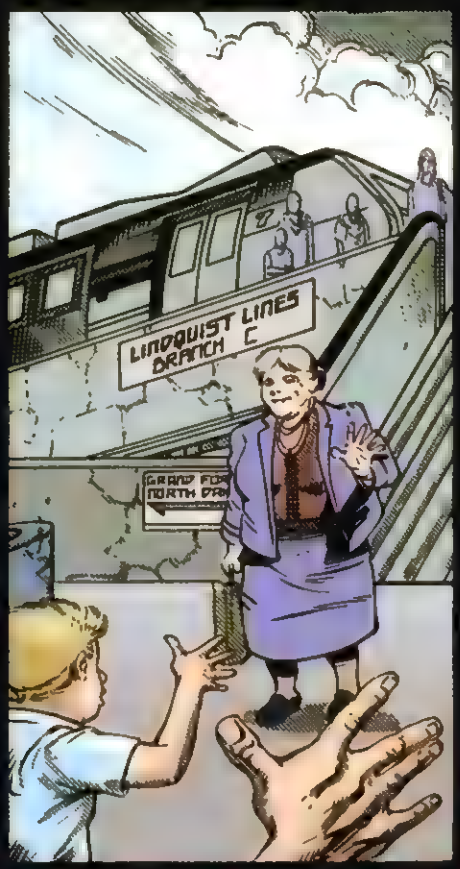
IT SOMEHOW KNEW THAT I HAD SEEN THE WRECKAGE. WE SHARED A GROTESQUE FORM OF EMPATHY--
BILLIE--WHAT'S IT DOING TO YOU?
UKKK-- IT--WANTS ME TO KNOW--
I COULD ONLY PICK OUT BITS AND PIECES--LIKE SOMEONE BLINKING CHANNELS ON A VIDEO.
IT DESCRIBED A SHIP--SOME KIND OF MISSION--
THE EGGS--OH GOD-- THE EGGS--
DON'T--MAKE ME-- SEE IT--AGAIN--
MY NAME-- IS BILLIE-- I'M SIX YEARS OLD--
--MY FATHER KNELT--IN FRONT OF THE PODS. I COULD SEE HIM OVER THE TRACTOR'S MONITOR-- I COULD SEE THE EXCITEMENT IN HIS EYES--
JESUS, SARAH, I SEE SOMETHING MOVING-- I THINK THEY'RE STILL ALI--

AGGHHH--
DADDY--NO!
DADDY--NO!
THE PILOT ABOARD THE CARGO VESSEL LOST CONTROL OF IT'S SHIP--
IT SHOULD HAVE DRIFTED FOREVER--IT SHOULD HAVE CARRIED THE ALIEN THINGS INTO THE HELL OF DEEP SPACE.
SKKKKASSSSHHH
INSTEAD IT CRASHED INTO THE WORLD THAT MAN WOULD CHRISTEN RIM--AND THE SPORE SURVIVED.
THEY WAITED PATIENTLY FOR NEW BLOOD. THEY FOUND IT IN THE COLONISTS--MY PARENTS--
YOUR--FRIEND--?

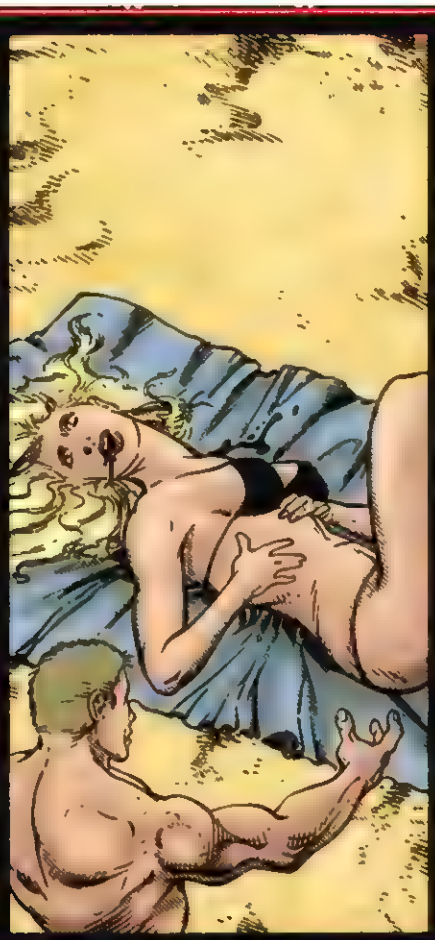

I COULD HEAR A HIGH PITCHED WHINE IN MY EARS, LIKE SOME DISTANT, HORRIBLE SCREAM.
THIS ANTENNA'S SHOT. WE'LL HAVE TO BYPASS IT AND RUN THE DIRECTIONALS THROUGH THE AFT SYSTYEM.
MY MIND WAS SLIPPING AWAY.
WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND EVIL. IT'S AN INTANGIBLE THING--LIKE THE AIR OR THE SKY--
--AND JUST AS PERVASIVE.
I WANTED TO BELIEVE THERE WAS SOMETHING BETTER--THAT THERE WAS SOME KIND OF HOPE.
IT WATCHED US WITH IT'S DEAD EYES AND I FELT A CHILL. IT HAD COME TO THE ALIEN HOME-WORLD OUT OF HATE. IT HAD RESCUED US IN THE NAME OF REVENGE.
PERHAPS EVIL IS THE ONLY UNIVERSAL TRUTH.


EYES ONLY DOUBLE A-ALPHA LOG ON, ORONA.
I-I'VE LOST TRACK OF TIME SINCE THE BIONATIONAL ATTACK I'VE BARRICADED MYSELF IN MY OFFICE TO GIVE ME TIME TO PREPARE THIS FINAL REPORT.
EVIDENTLY THE ALIEN QUEEN IS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN SOME SUBCONSCIOUS FASHION. WITH OTHER SPECIES, IN HUMAN BEINGS, THESE DISSEMINATIONS MANIFEST THEMSELVES IN THE FORM OF PATTERN NIGHTMARES.
THE DREAMS WERE A LURE.
AT FIRST WE THOUGHT WE'D BE ABLE TO CONTAIN THE SPORE. INFESTATION SEEMED LIMITED TO A NARROW GEOGRAPHIC RANGE.
BRRRP!
AAGH...!
AND YET FOR EVERY CLUSTER WE FOUND, THERE WERE TEN MORE JUST LIKE IT.
NAME'S OSTROW. LOOKS LIKE HE WAS SOME SORT OF BIG SHOT WITH BIONATIONAL.
BURN THE SON OF A BITCH.

THE ALIEN'S SUBCONSCIOUS BAIT TRANSCENDED CLASS AND POLITICAL BOUNDARIES. WE FOUND HIVES EVERYWHERE.
COME ON, MOVE IT!
I WANT A PERIMETER AROUND THE HOUSE AND I WANT AIR SUPPORT, NOW--!
WITH EACH NEW DISCOVERY, OUR HOPE OF DESTROYING THE CREATURES BEFORE THEY ENTERED THE CIVILIAN POPULATION FADED.
POOM
HOWEVER WE STILL CONSIDERED CONTAINMENT AN OPTION. IN STUDYING THE BIONATIONAL FILES WE LEARNED THEIR QUEEN HAD GESTATED A NUMBER OF WEEKS PRIOR TO MATURATION.
USING THEIR EXPERIMENT AS A BASELINE, I ASSUMED WE STILL HAD TIME BEFORE ANY NEW QUEENS WOULD BECOME VIABLE.
BLAM BLAM BLAM
PWM PWM
I WAS WRONG.



PERHAPS OUR WORST MISTAKE WAS UNDERESTIMATING THE SHEER INSTINCTUAL *CUNNING* OF THE CREATURES. WE DIDN'T SEE THE UNDERLYING *PATTERN* BEHIND THEIR EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS--THE WAY EVERY FACET OF THEIR EXISTENCE WAS GEARED TOWARD *PROPAGATION*. THE QUEENS MATURED AT WHATEVER SPEED THEIR *SURVIVAL* DICTATED.

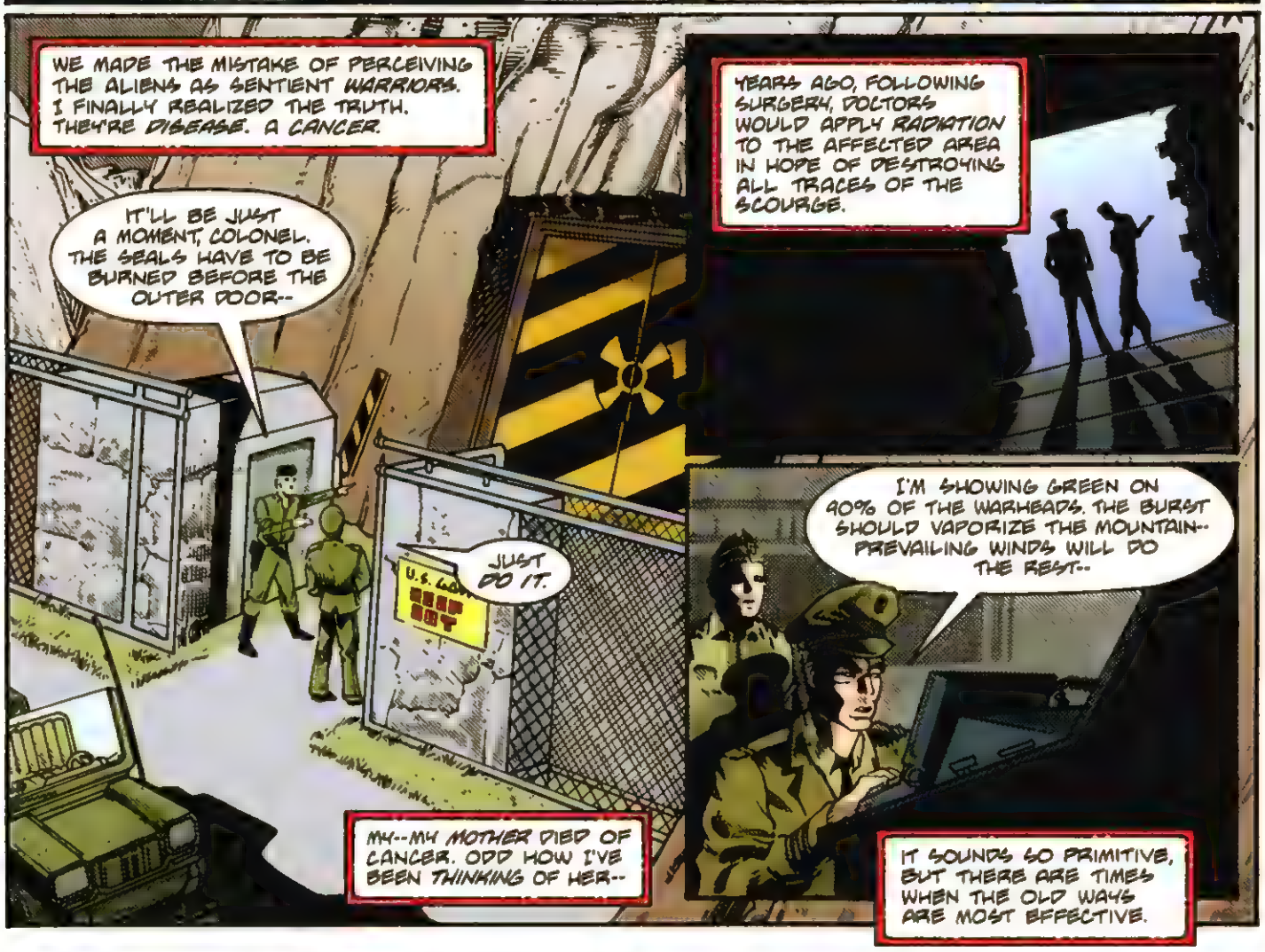


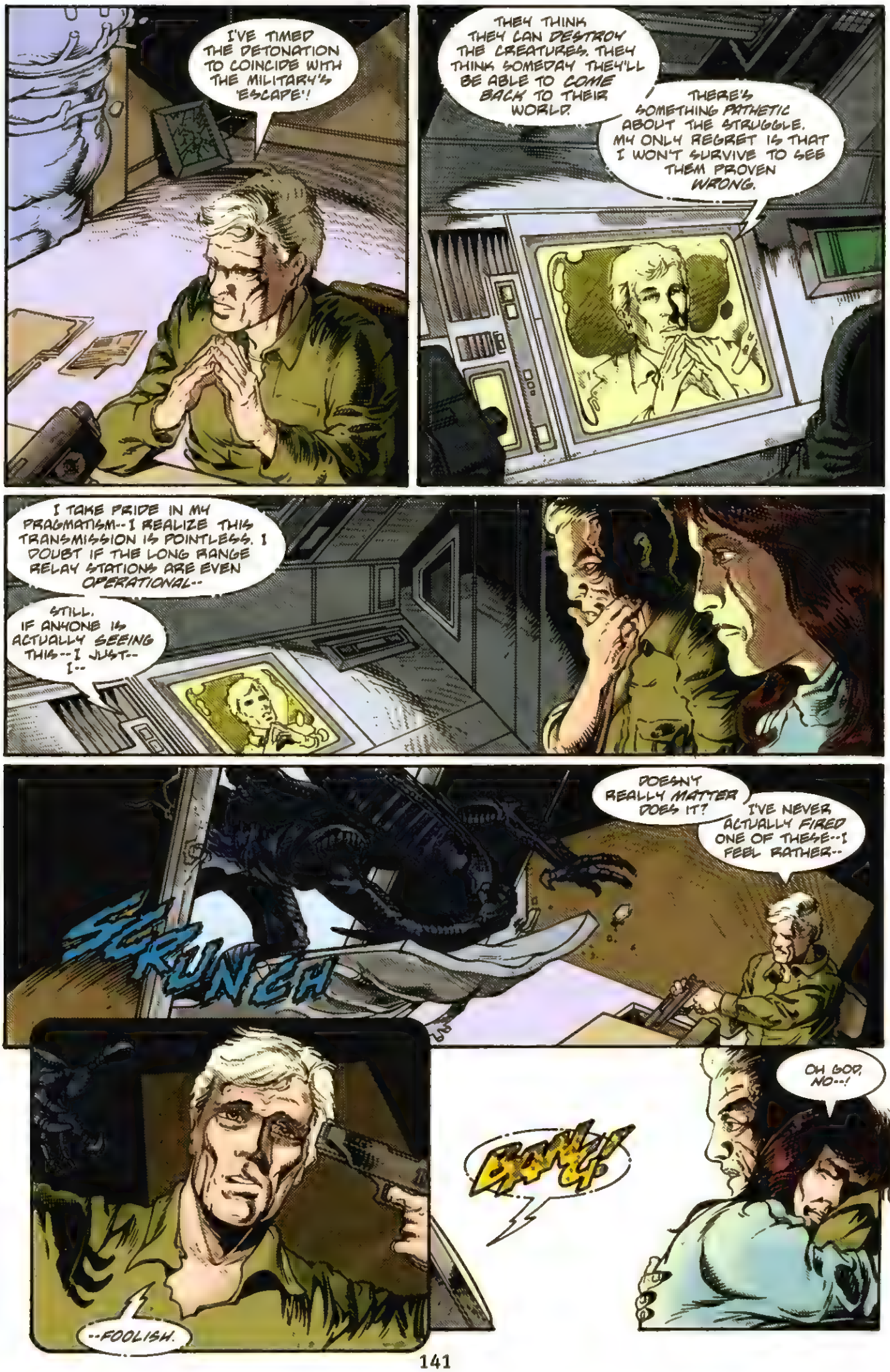
WE HAD ASSUMED THE GESTATION PERIOD WAS TIME FOR THE ALIEN EMBRYO TO FEED AND GROW, BUT IT WAS MORE THAN THAT. IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE UNKNOWING *HOST* TO SPREAD IT'S *SPORE* TO OTHER SITES.

THERE WAS A GEOMETRIC PERFECTION TO THE INFESTATIONS.
EACH QUEEN WOULD LAY STILL MORE QUEENS, AND WITH EVERY GENERATION THE SPORE BECAME MORE ENTRENCHED, MORE--
WHUMP!
AHH. AT LAST.
THE CIVILIAN AUTHORITY WAS WEAK IN THE FACE OF THE DEVASTATION. WHEN THE GENERALS FINALLY STAGED THEIR COUP IT SEEMED ALMOST--WELCOME.
AGHH--YOU CAN'T DO THIS--IT'S AGAINST THE--
SHUT UP!
3ZZ
THE MILITARY CREATED TESTING CENTERS WHERE PHYSICIANS CHECKED CIVILIANS FOR SIGNS OF THE ALIEN INFECTION. AT FIRST THE TESTS WERE VOLUNTARY.
Testing CENTER
WITHIN DAYS THAT CHANGED.
THERE WERE RUMORS THE MILITARY WAS USING THE PRETEXT OF ALIEN INFECTION TO ELIMINATE POLITICAL DISSIDENTS--THE POOR, THE DISAFFECTED--
AS IF SUCH PETTY RIVALRIES EVEN MATTERED.

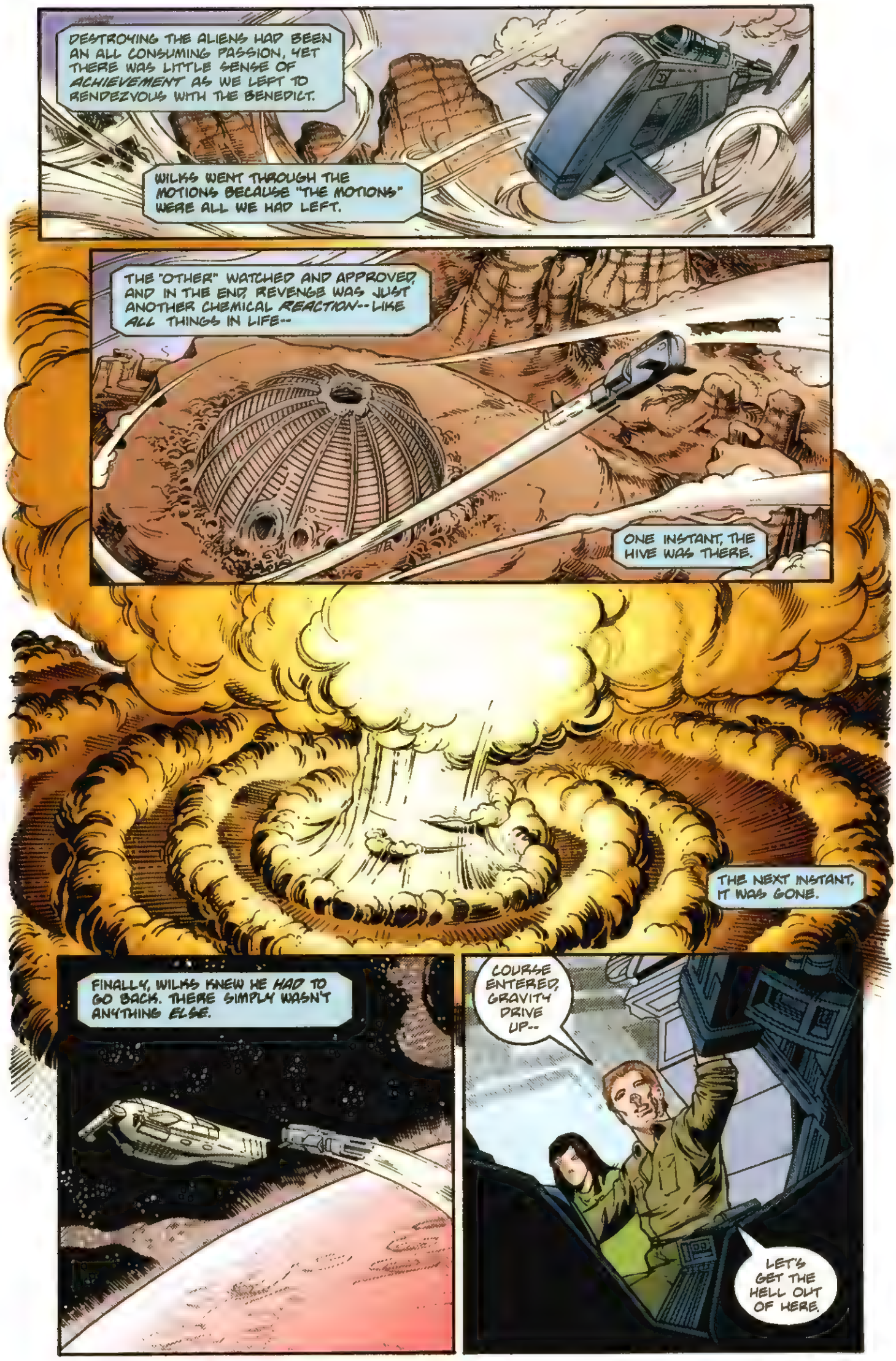
VITAL SERVICES-- WATER, ELECTRICITY-- BEGAN TO FAIL.
WE'VE HEARD OF INFESTATIONS IN EUROPE, AUSTRALIA. THE SEED IS GROWING WITH REMARKABLE SPEED.
FROM ALL THIS, I'VE COME TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING ABOUT HUMANITY.
MAN IS AN ANIMAL, DRIVEN BY ANIMAL PASSIONS. "CIVILIZATION" IS A PATHETIC CHARADE OF MANNERS, PREDICATED ON A TISSUE-THIN VEIL OF LIES.
IN THE FUTURE-- IF THERE IS A FUTURE-- HISTORIANS MAY BLAME OUR FAILURES ON SOME EXTERNAL CAUSE--
--THE ALIENS. BIONATIONAL. FATE.
I KNOW THE TRUTH. THOSE THINGS DIDN'T DESTROY US.
WE DID.

HUMM
THEY-- THEY'LL BE HERE SOON.
THE MILITARY HAS ORGANIZED OFF-WORLD SHIPS TO EVACUATE "VITAL PERSONNEL" TO THE OUTER COLONIES--MAINLY THEIR OWN PRECIOUS HIDES.
I'VE CHOSEN TO REMAIN BEHIND.

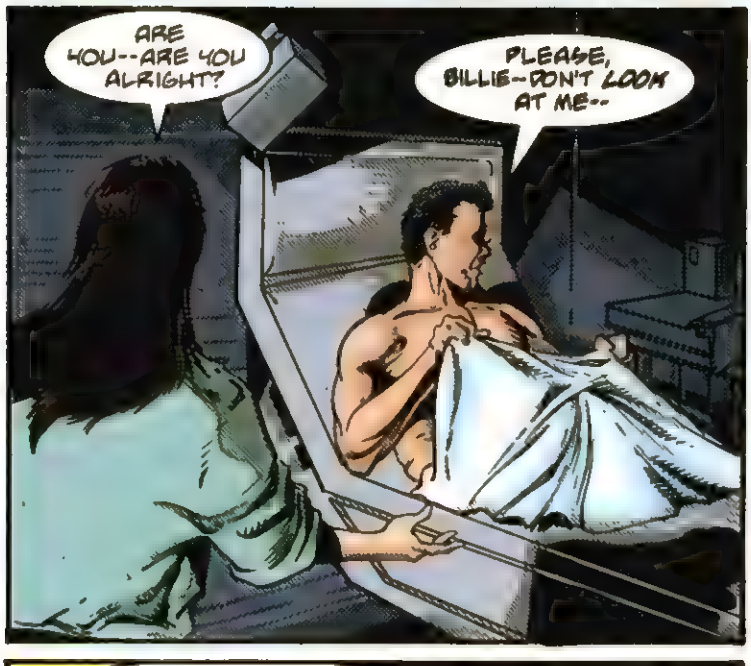

WE MADE THE MISTAKE OF PERCEIVING THE ALIENS AS SENTIENT WARRIORS. I FINALLY REALIZED THE TRUTH. THEY'RE DISEASE. A CANCER.
IT'LL BE JUST A MOMENT, COLONEL. THE SEALS HAVE TO BE BURNED BEFORE THE OUTER DOOR--
JUST DO IT.
MY--MY MOTHER DIED OF CANCER. ODD HOW I'VE BEEN THINKING OF HER--
YEARS AGO, FOLLOWING SURGERY, DOCTORS WOULD APPLY RADIATION TO THE AFFECTED AREA IN HOPE OF DESTROYING ALL TRACES OF THE SCOURGE.
I'M SHOWING GREEN ON 90% OF THE WARHEADS. THE BURST SHOULD VAPORIZE THE MOUNTAIN-- PREVAILING WINDS WILL DO THE REST--
IT SOUNDS SO PRIMITIVE, BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE OLD WAYS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE.


I'VE TIMED THE DETONATION TO COINCIDE WITH THE MILITARY'S 'ESCAPE'!
THEY THINK THEY CAN DESTROY THE CREATURES. THEY THINK SOMEDAY THEY'LL BE ABLE TO COME BACK TO THEIR WORLD.
THERE'S SOMETHING PATHETIC ABOUT THE STRUGGLE. MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT I WON'T SURVIVE TO SEE THEM PROVEN WRONG.
I TAKE PRIDE IN MY PRAGMATISM--I REALIZE THIS TRANSMISSION IS POINTLESS. I DOUBT IF THE LONG RANGE RELAY STATIONS ARE EVEN OPERATIONAL--
STILL, IF ANYONE IS ACTUALLY SEEING THIS--I JUST--I--
DOESN'T REALLY MATTER DOES IT?
I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY FIRED ONE OF THESE--I FEEL RATHER--
SCRUNCH
--FOOLISH.
BANG!
OH GOD, NO--!

DAMN THEM-- DAMN THEM ALL TO HELL.
THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD BREED THE MONSTERS. CHRIST--
--THE MONSTERS WERE BREEDING US!
WE'VE GOT TO GO BACK.
TO THOSE THINGS? TO SPIT AND POLISH BASTARDS? I'M NOT SURE WHICH IS WORSE--
IT'S OVER, BILLIE. WE'RE HELPLESS.
YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'RE HELPLESS.
IT'S NOT.


DESTROYING THE ALIENS HAD BEEN AN ALL CONSUMING PASSION, YET THERE WAS LITTLE SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT AS WE LEFT TO RENDEZVOUS WITH THE BENEDICT.
WILKS WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS BECAUSE "THE MOTIONS" WERE ALL WE HAD LEFT.
THE "OTHER" WATCHED AND APPROVED, AND IN THE END, REVENGE WAS JUST ANOTHER CHEMICAL REACTION--LIKE ALL THINGS IN LIFE--
ONE INSTANT, THE HIVE WAS THERE.
THE NEXT INSTANT, IT WAS GONE.
FINALLY, WILKS KNEW HE HAD TO GO BACK. THERE SIMPLY WASN'T ANYTHING ELSE.
COURSE ENTERED, GRAVITY DRIVE UP--
LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

WE WERE NOTHING WHEN WE LEFT EARTH. WE'D BEEN SENT TO FIND SPECIMENS. WE WERE RETURNING WITH SALVATION.
THE WORD SEEMED HOLLOW, RIDICULOUS. WHERE WOULD I FIND MY SALVATION?
--BUELLER?
DON'T-- PLEASE--


ARE YOU--ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
PLEASE, BILLIE--DON'T LOOK AT ME--

I--I CAN'T. I NEED TO KNOW.
I NEED TO KNOW IF--IF WHAT WE HAD WAS REAL.

WHEN THAT--THING TORE INTO ME--I REMEMBER THINKING HOW MUCH I LOVED YOU--
--THEN I SAW WHAT WAS LEFT--AND SUDDENLY I KNEW--
--GOD, WE ALL KNEW--

WILKS SAID IT WAS JUST PROGRAMMING--PART OF SOME SOCIALIZATION PROCESS--YOU BELIEVED YOU WERE HUMAN BECAUSE IT WAS EASIER--
BUT THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US. IT CAN'T.

IT--
CAN'T--

I--I TOUCHED HIM. HIS SKIN WAS WARM--SOFT.
HE WAS ALIVE.

MAYBE ALL LIFE IS LIKE WILKS' REVENGE--CHEMICAL--RANDOM--
--HATE--DEATH--LOVE--ALL MEANINGLESS OUTSIDE SOME LARGER CONTEXT--

--IT ALWAYS COMES BACK TO OUR ARROGANCE. THE SCIENTISTS WANT TO DRAW A LINE BETWEEN MAN AND HIS MACHINES--
BILLIE--
--BUT WHAT DID IT MATTER? BUELLER CARED FOR ME. NOT LIKE WILKS--NOT LIKE EARTH'S DOCTORS--

WHAT MADE THEIR HATE MORE ALIVE THAN THEIR CREATION'S LOVE?

TIME PASSED QUICKLY. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE RIM, I FELT A SENSE OF CALM.
EARTH DRIFTED BELOW US LIKE SOME BRIGHT TOY, AND AT LONG LAST WE WERE HOME.
WE HAVEN'T GOT MUCH TIME. THE CREATURES HAVE BREACHED THE GALVESTON SECURITY LINE--I THOUGHT ORONA SAID--
ORONA'S DEAD--! HAPPENED WEEKS AGO-- WE FOUND WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIM INSIDE THE MAIN BIO LAB--
SIR--WE'RE PICKING UP TWO SHIPS ON THE DS SCANNER-- ONE'S EMITTING A STANDARD-TYPE FOUR BEACON--THE OTHER IS UNIDENTIFIED--
THE TYPE FOUR'S ASKING PERMISSION TO LAND. WE'VE CANNIBALIZED MOST OF THE TRANSCODE COMPUTERS, BUT I MANAGED TO PULL A PRELIMINARY I.D.--
THE BENEDICT--MY GOD-- STEPHEN'S SHIP--
GRANT PERMISSION FOR LANDING. I'LL MEET THEM AT THE PAD PERSONALLY--

WIND AND RAIN BATTERED THE SHIP AS WE SETTLED ON THE LANDING PLATFORM. IT WAS ALMOST AS IF NATURE ITSELF WERE REBELLING AGAINST THE MILITARY'S PLAN.
THE RAIN REMINDED ME OF RIM--REMINDED ME OF MY INNOCENCE--
TAKE THE SYNTHETICS TO REHAB--WE'LL DEAL WITH THEM LATER--
--ONE OF THE BIONATIONAL EXECUTIVES TOLD US ABOUT STEPHENS AFTER ALL THE SHIT CAME DOWN--
--YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THOSE BASTARDS ANY--
DAMN IT, LISTEN TO ME--ORONA TRANSMITTED A MESSAGE ABOUT THE DETONATION JUST BEFORE HE DIED. YOU HAVE TO STOP IT--

"--THERE MAY BE ANOTHER WAY--"
--WE'VE SUSPECTED THE EXISTENCE OF OTHER SENTIENT BEINGS SINCE THE NOSTROMO MISSION. IT DOESN'T CHANGE THINGS.
THE ALIENS HAVE WON, CORPORAL. BASIC MILITARY TACTICS--WHEN YOU'RE OUTGUNNED, YOU RETREAT--AND LEAVE NOTHING FOR YOUR ENEMY.
JESUS--HAVEN'T YOU HEARD ANYTHING I'VE SAID? THERE'S STILL A CHANCE IF YOU'LL DEAL WITH THE--
TH-THEY DON'T WANT TO STOP IT.
WHAT--?
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE ALIENS OVERRUN US--WE'VE GOT TO DEAL WITH THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION--
ORONA UNDERSTOOD. THE ALIEN ATTACK ISN'T EVIL. IT'S OPPORTUNITY--

"--EARTH'S BEEN ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION FOR DECADES. THERE'S NO *DISCIPLINE*--NO *ORDER*.

"THE ALIENS ONLY *EXACERBATED* THE SITUATION. IT WOULD HAVE COME TO THIS SOONER OR LATER.

"IT'S A CHANCE TO *CLEAN* THE *SLATE*--A CHANCE TO START AGAIN--

"AFTER A FEW YEARS--WHEN IT'S OVER--THE SURVIVORS CAN RETURN AND TERRAFORM EARTH INTO SOMETHING *BEAUTIFUL* AGAIN--

"ORONA UNDERSTOOD--THE ALIENS HAVE GIVEN US A CHANCE TO *REDISCOVER* OURSELVES--

"IT'S A *GOOD* THING."

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE RIM, I *LAUGHED*. I LAUGHED BECAUSE *WORDS* HAD LOST THEIR MEANING--BECAUSE THAT SON OF A BITCH ORONA HAD BEEN *RIGHT*--

--THE ALIENS *DIDN'T* DESTROY US--

--*WE* DID.

SIR--THERE'S BEEN A BREACH OF THE SOUTHERN PERIMETER. OUR SPOTTERS HAVE SEEN *HUNDREDS* OF THE--

LOCK DOWN THE SHIPS AND PREPARE FOR LAUNCH. IT'S *TIME*.

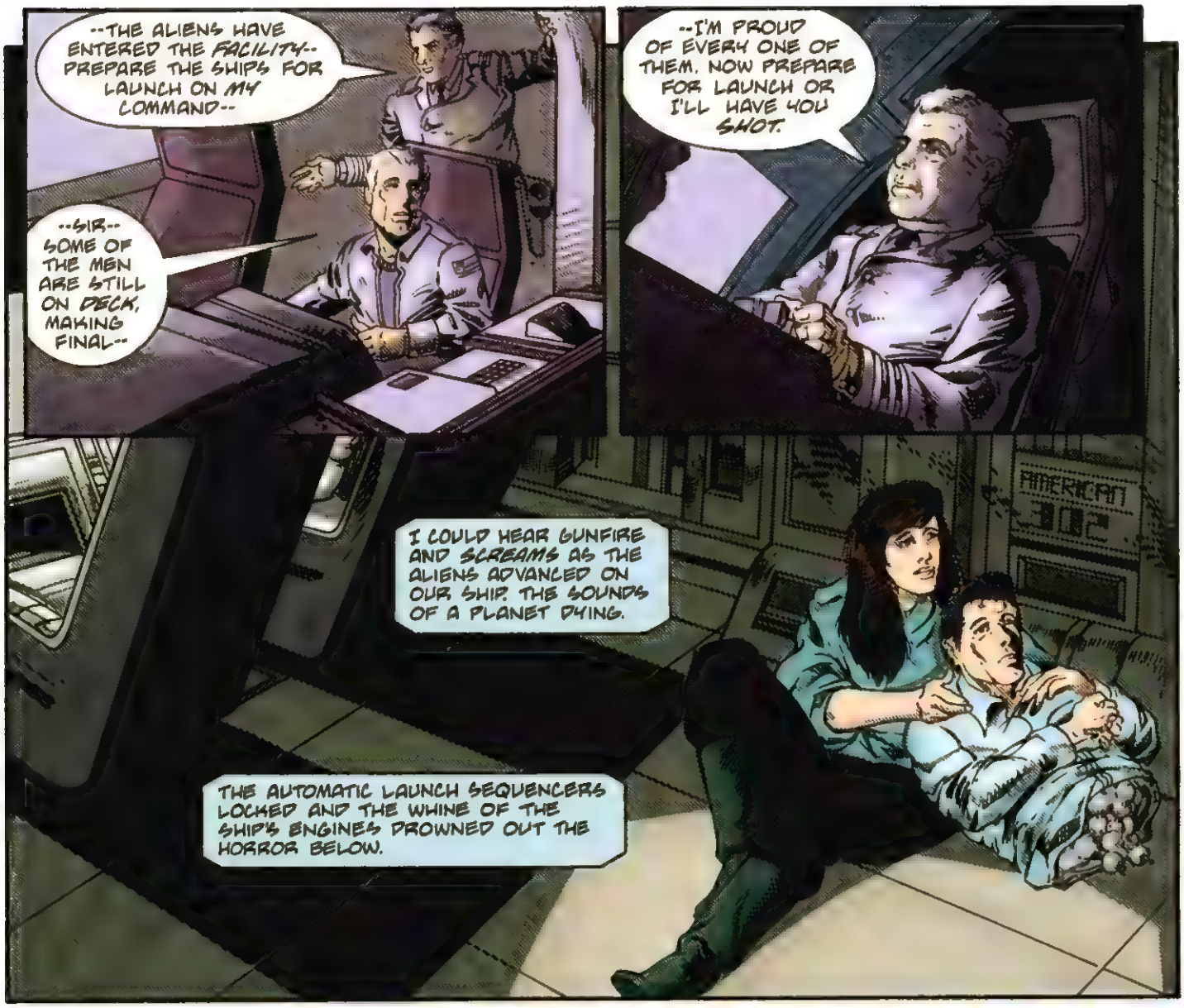
AND WHAT ABOUT *US*--?

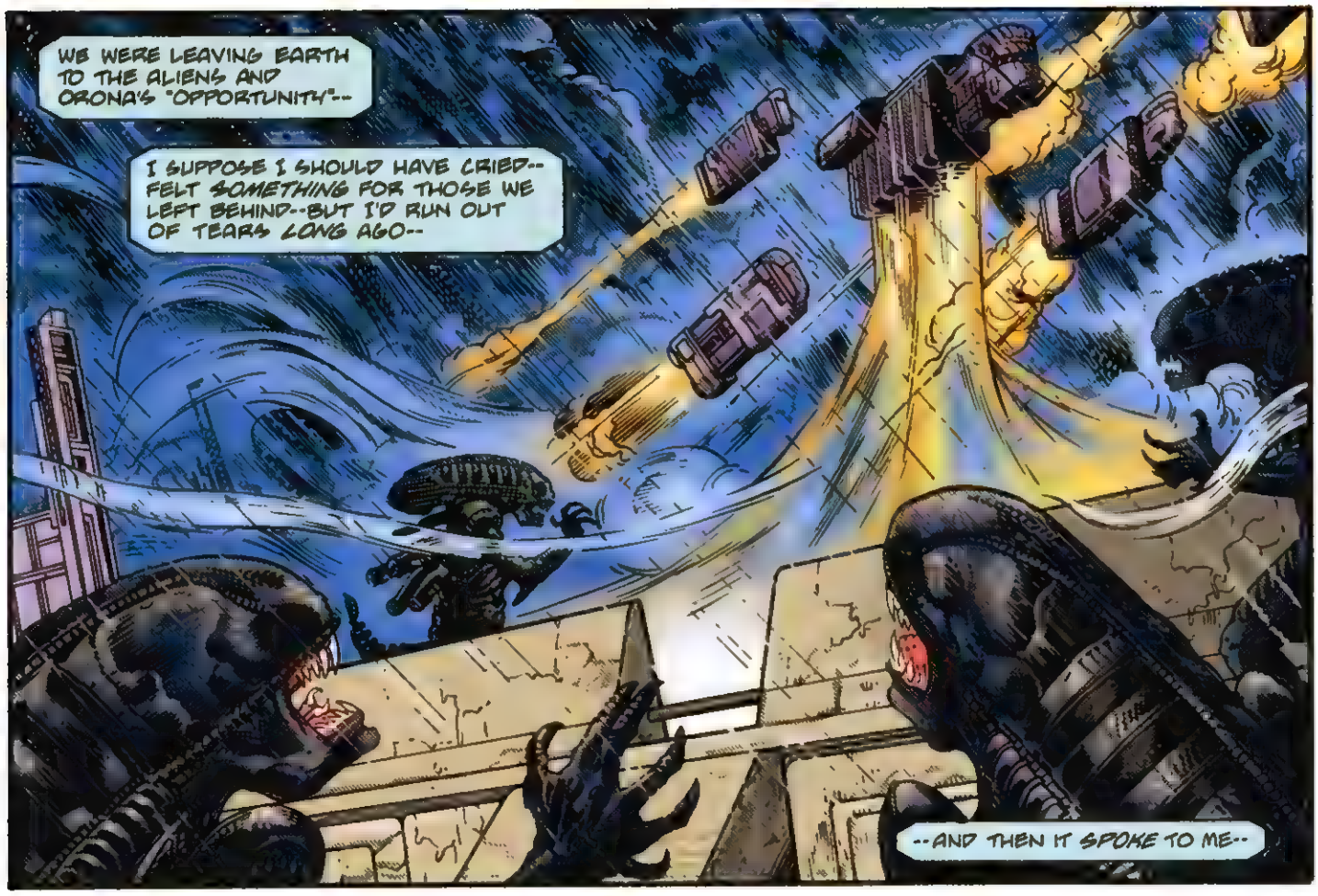
YOU DID WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS RIGHT. THE TIME FOR MILITARY PROTOCOL AND POLITE *INQUIRIES* ARE LONG PAST--

--YOU'RE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE STILL ON EARTH. *UNNECESSARY*.

--BACK AWAY--REPORT TO THE PAD FOR LAUNCH--!
FOW! FOW!
UNNECESSARY MY ASS.
JUST LET IT END. THE WAY IT SHOULD HAVE ENDED ON RIM--FOR BOTH OF US--
--I'M NOT GIVING THOSE ALIEN SHITS THE PLEASURE, AND NEITHER ARE YOU--
I SMUGGLED YOU ABOARD THE BENEDICT--AND IF I'VE LEARNED ONE THING ABOUT THE MILITARY IT'S THIS--
THEY NEVER LEARN--
WAIT--!
LEVEL 1
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS, BILLIE--
THIS IS WHERE THEY TOOK BUELLER--I--
OH GOD--WHAT HAVE THEY DONE--?
THEY DESTROYED THE OTHERS--TOOK WHAT THEY COULD SALVAGE--
I--I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D COME BACK.

--HALF THESE SHIPS ARE AUTOMATED CARGO CARRIERS--NO CREW. IF WE CAN IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC--
--THAT'S IT. DECK FOUR.
KEEP FIRING! KEEP FIRING! WE CAN'T LET THEM GET TO THE PAD--
--WE CAN'T LE--
BAM! BAM!
BRAP!
AAAGGGG--*
I'M STILL NOT SURE WHAT WILKS WAS THINKING AS WE CLIMBED ABOARD THE CARGO SHIP. PERHAPS HE WASN'T THINKING AT ALL--JUST REACTING AS THE SOLDIER IN HIM TOOK OVER--
THE AMERICAN
DAMN IT, HURRY!
--OR MAYBE AFTER ALL THE DEATH AND PAIN, SOMETHING FINALLY SPARKED INSIDE HIM SOMETHING PRECIOUS.
--WE GOT LUCKY. MOST OF THESE CARGO JOBS HAVE BEEN RETROFITTED FOR TOTAL AUTO OPERATION. THIS ONE STILL HAS SOME MANUAL CONTROLS.
--FULLY PRESSURIZED. ATMOSPHERE'S NOMINAL--MAKES SENSE--
--SHIP'S REGISTER SPECIFIES ORGANIC CARGO. HELL--IT'S NOAH'S HAPPY LITTLE ARK.
HIS WILL TO LIVE.


--THE ALIENS HAVE ENTERED THE FACILITY-- PREPARE THE SHIPS FOR LAUNCH ON MY COMMAND--
--SIR-- SOME OF THE MEN ARE STILL ON DECK, MAKING FINAL--
--I'M PROUD OF EVERY ONE OF THEM. NOW PREPARE FOR LAUNCH OR I'LL HAVE YOU SHOT.
I COULD HEAR GUNFIRE AND SCREAMS AS THE ALIENS ADVANCED ON OUR SHIP. THE SOUNDS OF A PLANET DYING.
THE AUTOMATIC LAUNCH SEQUENCERS LOCKED AND THE WHINE OF THE SHIP'S ENGINES DROWNED OUT THE HORROR BELOW.


WE WERE LEAVING EARTH TO THE ALIENS AND ORONA'S "OPPORTUNITY"--
I SUPPOSE I SHOULD HAVE CRIED-- FELT SOMETHING FOR THOSE WE LEFT BEHIND--BUT I'D RUN OUT OF TEARS LONG AGO--
--AND THEN IT SPOKE TO ME--

--SOMETHING EXPLODED--BRIGHT, LIKE A MILLION SUNS--
I--
CAN--
SEE--
BILLIE--WHAT'S WRONG--?
IT--IT HAD CHANGED SINCE THE HOMEWORLD. IT TOOK ME A MOMENT TO FULLY COMPREHEND--
AGGH--
IT UNDERSTOOD ABOUT ORONA--IT KNEW HIS TWISTED PLAN--
WE THOUGHT IT SHARED OUR THIRST FOR VENGEANCE. WE LED IT TO EARTH IN THE MISTAKEN BELIEF IT MIGHT WANT TO "HELP" US.
HOW COULD WE HAVE BEEN SO BLIND? IT SHARED SO MANY OF OUR MERCURIAL HUMAN EMOTIONS. HATE. ANGER.
THE DESIRE TO CONQUER.
IT NO LONGER CARED ABOUT THE ALIENS. INTEREST HAD SHIFTED. THE SOLDIERS ASSUMED THEY WOULD RETURN ONE DAY AND TERRAFORM EARTH FOR THEMSELVES--
IT WOULD WATCH. IT WOULD BE WAITING FOR THEM.
IT JUST WANTED ME TO KNOW.

THE CARGO VESSEL'S NAVIGATIONAL COMPUTERS WERE LOCKED ONTO A DEEP SPACE TRAJECTORY. THE GRAVITY DRIVE PULSED LIKE A LIVING THING, PROPELLING US ACROSS BILLIONS OF MILES OF SPACE.
WILKS FINALLY HAD HIS REVENGE, BUT HE FOUND NO *SATISFACTION* IN IT.
WHEN IT BEGAN, HE BLAMED HIS MISERY ON THE *ALIENS*. NOW ALL HE COULD BLAME WAS *HIMSELF*.
I WAS STANDING AT ONE OF THE VIEWPORTS, STARING INTO SPACE. THE LIGHT FROM THE STARS STRETCHED AROUND THE SHIP LIKE GLOWING WHITE NEON--
--BUT THIS TIME IT WAS *DIFFERENT*.
I WASN'T *ALONE* ANYMORE-- AND MAYBE, FINALLY, THAT WAS ALL THAT *MATTERED*.

NIGHTMARE ASYLUM

script
MARK VERHEIDEN

art
DEN BEAUVAIS

lettering
WILLIE SCHUBERT

title illustration
DEN BEAUVAIS

IN SPACE, YOU BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUE NATURE OF *IMMORTALITY*.
OUT HERE, SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL CONCERNS SEEM *TRIVIAL*--INSIGNIFICANT.
WE'RE FOURTEEN--NO, *FIFTEEN* DAYS OUT FROM EARTH. IT MIGHT AS WELL BE *YEARS*.
THE MAIN ANTENNA WAS STILL PICKING UP FRAGMENTS OF EARTH ORBIT SATELLITE TRANSMISSIONS. TOOK DAYS FOR THE SIGNALS TO REACH US--IT WAS LIKE WATCHING *SHADOWS*.
MOSTLY PRERECORDS--DIGITAL CHIPS, MAG CARTS--BUT OCCASIONALLY WE'D GET SOMETHING *LIVE* OFF THE BOUNCE.
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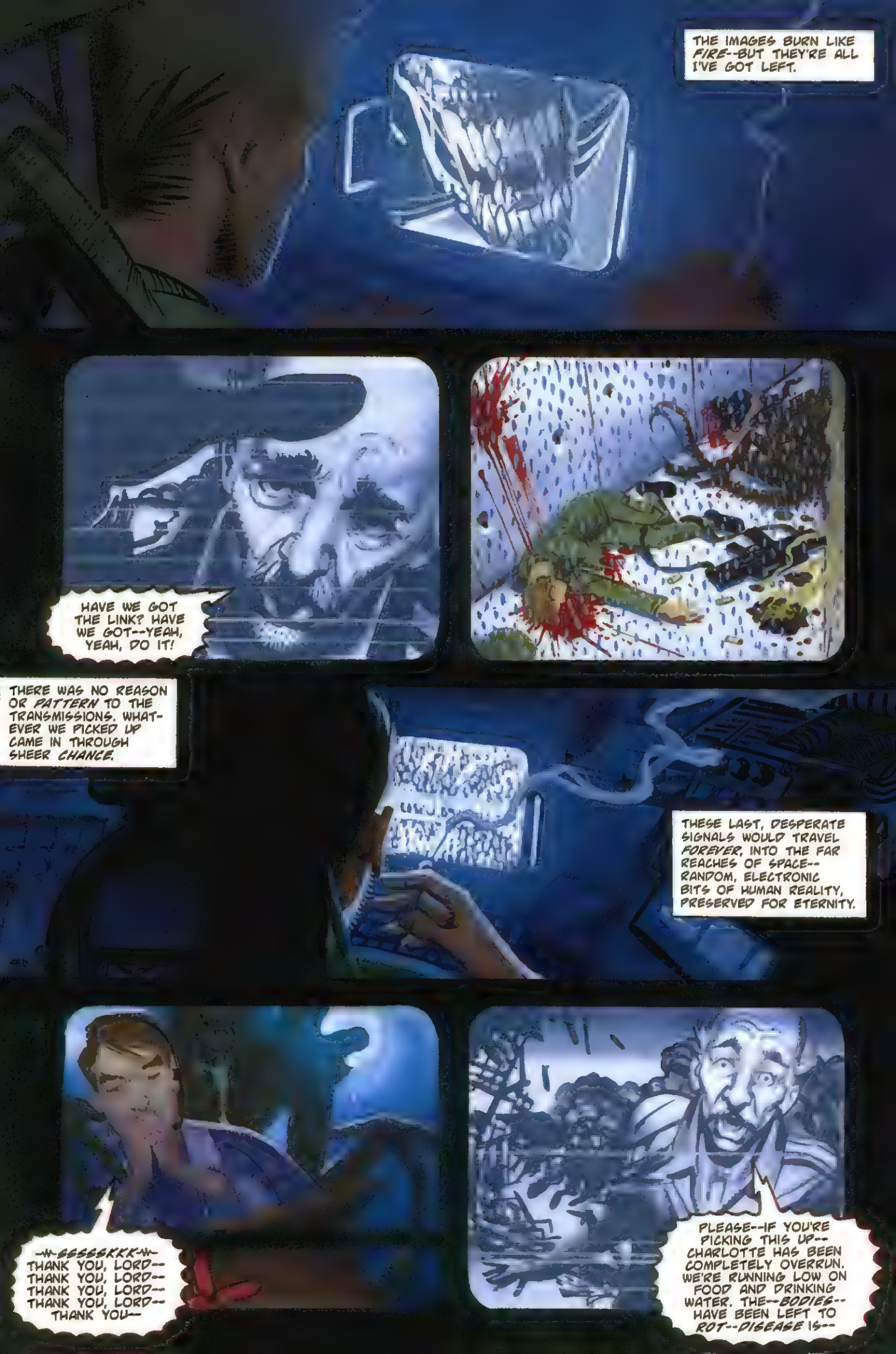
THE AMERICAN


THE IMAGES BURN LIKE *FIRE*--BUT THEY'RE ALL I'VE GOT LEFT.
HAVE WE GOT THE LINK? HAVE WE GOT--YEAH, YEAH, DO IT!
THERE WAS NO REASON OR *PATTERN* TO THE TRANSMISSIONS. WHATEVER WE PICKED UP CAME IN THROUGH SHEER *CHANCE*.
THESE LAST, DESPERATE SIGNALS WOULD TRAVEL *FOREVER*, INTO THE FAR REACHES OF SPACE--RANDOM, ELECTRONIC BITS OF HUMAN REALITY, PRESERVED FOR ETERNITY.
-SSSSSKKK-
THANK YOU, LORD--THANK YOU, LORD--THANK YOU, LORD--THANK YOU, LORD--THANK YOU--
PLEASE--IF YOU'RE PICKING THIS UP--CHARLOTTE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY OVERRUN. WE'RE RUNNING LOW ON FOOD AND DRINKING WATER. THE--*BODIES*--HAVE BEEN LEFT TO *ROT*--*DISEASE* IS--

THERE WAS A STRANGE, ALMOST *SPIRITUAL* IRONY TO IT ALL.

THROUGH OUR MACHINES, EVEN MANKIND'S *DESTRUCTION* WOULD ENDURE IN A PERVERSE SORT OF *IMMORTALITY.*

AS TIME PASSED, LIVE TRANSMISSIONS WERE LESS FREQUENT. WHAT REMAINED WERE *STATIC* IMAGES GENERATED FROM AUTOMATIC SOURCES.

MY GOD--WE WERE A SPECIES IN *LOVE* WITH OUR DECEITS. CLANDESTINE MONITORING DEVICES WHIRRED ON WITHOUT FUNCTION, BLANDLY RECORDING MANKIND'S DEMISE.

--LORD, THANK YOU, LORD, THANK YYYAA*AGGHH*--!

I WAS ASTONISHED BY THEIR SHEER *NUMBER.*

--NOTHING STOPS THEM--WE'VE KILLED HUNDREDS AND IT DOESN'T SEEM TO--
-+-GSSSZZZZKKK-+-

DARWIN WAS RIGHT

ALL THIS TECHNOLOGY, AND FOR WHAT POSSIBLE REASON? *WHO WAS WATCHING?*

EXPLANATIONS WERE LOST IN THE DEVASTATION.

WHEN THE AUTOMATIC SIGNALS STOPPED, I KNEW IT WAS OVER.

JESUS CHRIST. WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED THE FIRST TIME I WAS WITH HIM. EVERYTHING WAS SO--PERFECT.
WE'VE COME OUT OF GRAVITY DRIVE, BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THAT MEANS. THERE'S NO WAY INTO THE NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM WITHOUT THE ACCESS CODE.
WHAT THE HELL KIND OF SHIP IS THIS?
SKIN--HAIR--MUSCULATURE--ALL OF IT METICULOUSLY DESIGNED AND SYNTHESIZED.
I CAN INITIATE SHORT TEST BURNS IN THE THRUSTERS, BUT THE COMPUTER AUTOMATICALLY COMPENSATES FOR COURSE AND TRAJECTORY. WE'RE JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE.
IT'S ALL RIGHT...
NO--IT'S NOT ALL RIGHT. WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING--HOW LONG IT'S GOING TO TAKE--
I COULD IMAGINE HIS DESIGNER RELAXING BEHIND A GENETIC SCHEMATIC, ADDING AND SUBTRACTING FEATURES WITH THE ARBITRARY TWIST OF A DIAL.
GOD, I LOVE YOU SO MU--
DON'T--PLEASE, BILLIE--DON'T...
I--I'M GOING TO TRY AND GET SOME REST--
HE WAS AN ANDROID CONSTRUCT--A REPLICA. I THINK HE WAS AS SURPRISED AS ANYONE WAS TO LEARN THE TRUTH.
BILLIE--BILLIE, I'M SORRY!
I STILL DON'T--UNDERSTAND--EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO ME...
IT WAS ALMOST FUNNY. BUELLER WAS THE FIRST MAN WHO EVER LOVED ME--AND HE WASN'T A MAN AT ALL.

I HAD TO KEEP MY MIND ON OUR SITUATION. EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS SHIP WAS *WRONG*.
PREPROGRAMMED NAVIGATION--NO WEAPONS--CAPABLE OF RECEIVING COMMUNICATIONS BUT NOT TRANSMITTING--WHAT THE HELL WERE THEY *DOING?*
THE ROOM STARTED TO GET *HOT*. I COULD FEEL THE SWEAT SLIDING DOWN MY BACK, MOIST AND STICKY.
WILKS--JESUS, YOU *FRIGHTENED* ME--
EVERYTHING *FRIGHTENS* YOU, BILLIE.
WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE, YOU WERE AFRAID OF DEATH. LATER, YOU WERE AFRAID OF *LIVING*.
WHAT'S *WRONG* WITH YOU? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN AFRAID OF *ME*.

PERHAPS YOU PREFER THAT--THING--ON THE FLIGHT DECK TO SOMEONE--TRULY HUMAN--
WHY IS THAT, BILLIE? EXPLAIN IT TO ME.
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
UNGGG--BECAUSE I'M EVERYTHING YOU FEAR--PASSION--LOVE--
--HUMANITY!
WILKS!
OH, MY GOD. THE DREAMS AGAIN...

...THEY'RE HERE!
WILKS--THE ALIENS--THEY'RE ON BOARD!
CHRIST, BILLIE, THEY'RE DEAD. LIKE EARTH, LIKE US.
MAYBE YOU'RE BURNED OUT. MAYBE YOU WANT TO DIE--
--NOT ME! NOT BY ONE OF THOSE THINGS!
THEY'RE JUST BAD DREAMS, BILLIE--WE'VE BEEN IN SPACE FOR WEEKS. WHY WOULD THEY WAIT UNTIL NOW?
I DON'T KNOW. NOTHING ABOUT THIS SHIP MAKES ANY SENSE--BUT IT'S MORE THAN JUST DREAMS.
I--I CAN FEEL THEM. THEY'RE WAITING.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LET IT GO, ARE YOU?
ALL RIGHT. YOU WANT TO PLAY SOLDIER, I'LL PLAY SOLDIER.
WE'VE ONLY GOT FIVE SHOTS LEFT. IF THEY ARE ON BOARD, IT'LL BE OVER SOON ENOUGH.

THEY MUST BE HERE.
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS, BILLIE. THE CARGO PITS ARE CODE BLOCKED LIKE THE REST OF THE DAMN SHIP. WE COULDN'T GET IN IF WE WANTED TO.
I THINK YOU WANT TO FIND THEM-- LIKE THAT MIGHT MEAN SOMETHING.
COMMUNICATIONS BUNDLE. SOMETHING'S TORN IT APART.
WHAT'S THAT SMELL?
SOMETHING-- BURNING.
WHAT TH-- FIRE!
FIRE
CARGO
IT'S IN THE CARGO HOLD!
SMOKE TRIGGERED THE FIRE SYSTEM.
IT'S BEEN BURNED WITH ACID!

AHHHH--! IT'S DEAD.
THE OTHERS MUST HAVE CANNIBALIZED IT FOR THE BLOOD!
HIBERNATION CHAMBERS!
I THOUGHT GRAVITY DRIVE MADE HYPERSLEEP OBSOLETE--
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FOR HUMANS, MAYBE.

PODS MUST HAVE CRACKED ON TAKE-OFF--DAMN THINGS HAVE BEEN ABOARD SINCE THE START!
THEY'VE BEEN WAITING--FEEDING--UNTIL THEY MATURED. UNTIL THEY WERE READY.
I COUNT FOUR BROKEN PODS. ONE'S DEAD. THAT MEANS THREE--

COME ON--WE HAVE TO GET UP TO THE FLIGHT DECK!
WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO SEAL OFF THE CARGO AREA FROM THE MAIN BOARD--THAT MIGHT GIVE US TIME TO--
YOU SON OF A BITCH--!
MAYBE WE BROUGHT IT ON OURSELVES--MAYBE THINGS LIKE YOU REALLY ARE THE NEXT EVOLUTIONARY STEP--
--I JUST DON'T GIVE A SHIT ANYMORE!

YEEEAAA--!
B-3
WILKS! IT'S BURNING THROUGH THE HULL!
DON'T LET IT TOUCH YOU--!
WILKS-- HURRY! WE HAVE TO CLEAR THE CARGO.

GET OUTSIDE-- PRESSURE HATCHES SEAL AUTOMATICALLY!
NOT--WITHOUT-- YOU--!
HANG ON, WILKS!
NOOOOO!!!

DZZZT
OVERRIDE, DAMMIT--
--COME ON, COME ON, COME ON!
AGGGHH--!
WILKS... PULL...
WILKS!
B-3
COLD--SO COLD--CA--CAN'T CATCH--MY BREATH--
YOU KILLED IT--IT'S OVER.
NO-- TWO LEFT.

BILLIE-- WHAT THE HELL'S GOING--
WE'VE GOT COMPANY.
THANKS, BILLIE! ;COFF!:
WHAT HAPPENED TO WILKS?
HE GOT CAUGHT IN VACUUM!
COFF! INBOARD VIDEO SYSTEM IS PRIMITIVE, BUT IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT.
NO MOTION SENSORS OR INFRAREDS--WE'LL HAVE TO FIND THEM VISUALLY.
THEY COULD BE ANYWHERE--:HAK HAK:-- THE DAMAGE CONTROL CAMERAS ARE LIMITED TO THE MAIN CREW AND ENGINEERING AREAS--
--AND EVEN IF WE FIND THEM-- WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH--
--SON OF A--
FIND SOMETHING?

D--DO WE HAVE ACCESS TO THE AFT DOCK DOORS?
WE'VE GOT ALL THE DISCRETIONARY SYSTEMS. BUT THE--
OPEN THEM!
THE INNER DOORS ARE SEALED, BUT WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE PRESSURE TO EQUALIZE OR--
NGGGGH-- JUST OPEN THEM!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WE GOT LUCKY.
LET'S SEE HOW THEY LIKE IT.
LOADING D-2 OPEN
STAND CLE

IT'S CLEAR.
:NNUGH!: STOMACH'S ON FIRE--
YOU WERE EXPOSED TO OPEN SPACE--YOU'RE SUFFERING FROM THE BENDS--
--IT SHOULD PASS WITH TIME, BUT--
:HAK: -- THIS ISN'T A MILITARY OPERATION--IT'S A MILK RUN--A DAMN DELIVERY--
WHAT KIND OF MISSION WOULD INVOLVE THOSE THINGS?
OH MY GOD...THE HULL!

DAMN IT, BILLIE-- YOU CAN'T GO OUT THERE ALONE--
THEY'RE STILL ALIVE. I DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.
WE'LL BE BLIND IN HERE--THERE AREN'T ANY EXTERNAL MONITORS. YOU'LL HAVE RADIO COMMUNICATION AND THAT'S ALL--
I'LL FIND THEM.
ZZZIP
THUMP
CLICK
K-CHUNK
I COULD HEAR THE AIR HISSING OUT OF THE CHAMBER. THE FABRIC OF MY SUIT RIPPLED AS THE PRESSURE DROPPED.
THE SILENCE WAS LOUD, LIKE A SCREAM. I COULD FEEL THEM OUTSIDE.
THEIR PATIENCE WAS THEIR STRENGTH. HUMANS MEASURE TIME IN MINUTES, SECONDS, MICROSECONDS.
TIME NEVER MATTERED TO THE ALIEN. ONLY SURVIVAL.
GOD HELP ME. I WAS BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND THEM.

I'M CROSSING OVER TOWARD THE MAIN ANTENNA.
COPY. WE-- WILKS!
:NGHHH:-- I'M ALL RIGHT, I'M ALL RIGHT, DAMMIT.
NOTHING UNUSUAL YET-- IT'S HARD TO SEE IN THE--
WAIT. THERE...
...THEY WANT IN.
I'M GOING TO DOUBLE BACK AND CHECK THE REAR OF THE SHIP--
--IT MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO GET IN THROUGH ONE OF THE--

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!
NO! NO! NO!
AAAAA--
RECOIL-- CAN'T GET FOOTING--

UNNGHH!
SHIT--BLASTER'S GONE!
NO SIGN OF THE OTHER--MAYBE IT WAS BLOWN CLEAR WHEN WILKS OPENED THE--
OH, GOD.
BILLIE--WHERE IS IT--?
INSIDE THE REAR THRUSTERS...
...IT'S BEEN WAITING FOR ME...

WILKS--WE CAN ACCESS THE THRUSTERS IF WE--
WILKS!
THE ALIEN SEEMED TO HESITATE AND I SENSED A MOMENT OF--RECOGNITION.
BILLIE--STAY CLEAR OF THE ENGINES!
THE ALIEN ENJOYED AN ETHICAL PURITY THAT TRANSCENDED MORALITY. IT DIDN'T CONCERN ITSELF WITH HUMAN CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL--IT DIDN'T HAVE TO.
HURRY, BUELLER!
IT BORE NO MALICE WHEN IT KILLED, AND THAT WAS WHERE WE WERE DIFFERENT.
WARRIOR THRUST PAGE
IGNITION

IN THE BLACK VACUUM OF SPACE, *DEATH* WAS THE ONLY *ABSOLUTE*--
--*SURVIVAL* THE ONLY IMPERATIVE--
--AND I TOOK *PLEASURE* IN WATCHING IT *BURN*.

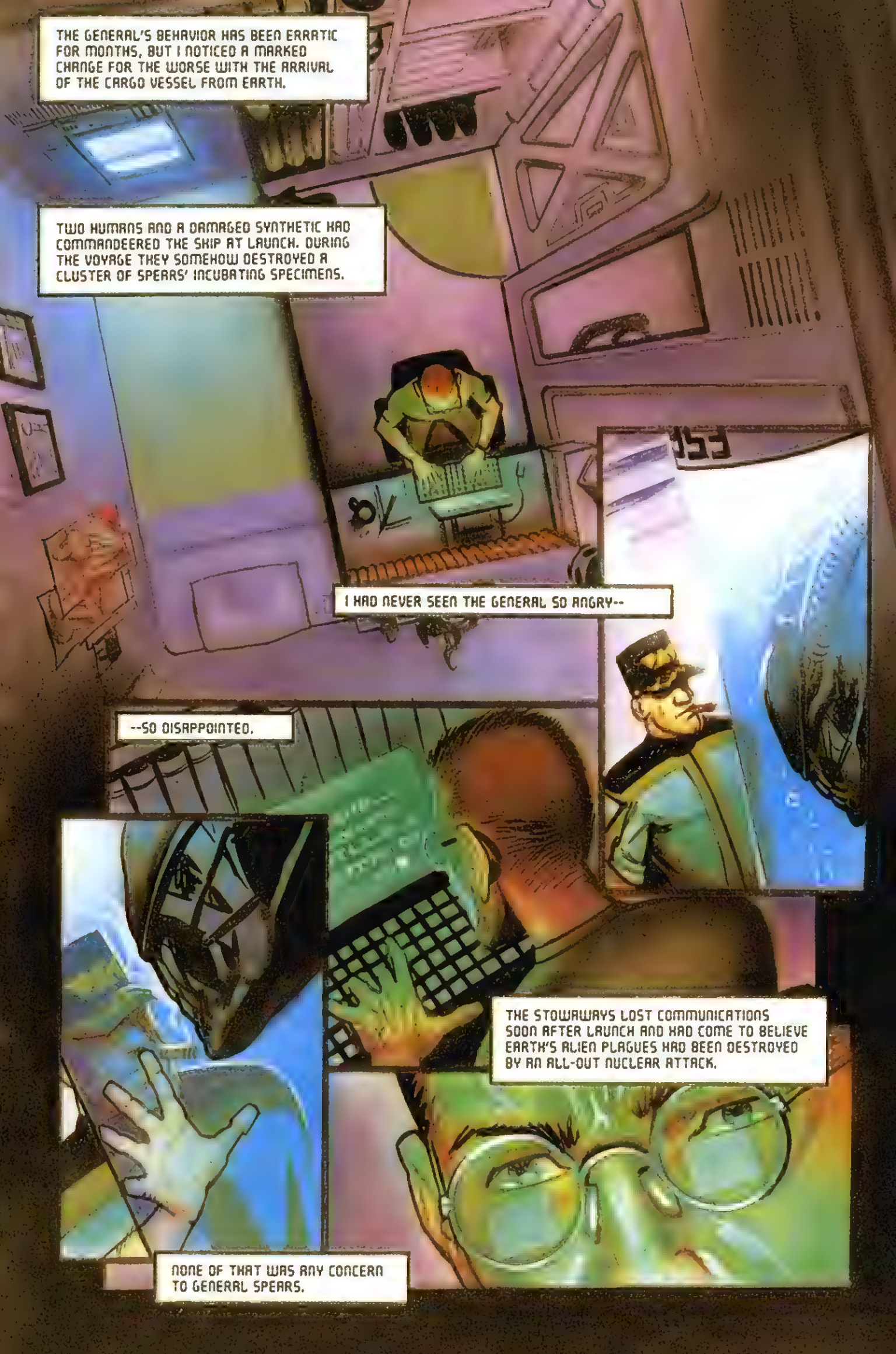
I'D ALWAYS TAKEN COMFORT IN WILKS' STRENGTH. IT WAS A SHOCK TO SEE HIM LIKE THIS. SO FRAIL--ALMOST *DELICATE*.
THIS TIME HE'D RECOVER. HE HADN'T ALWAYS BEEN SO LUCKY.
I TRIED TO REMEMBER HOW HE LOOKED *BEFORE*, BUT IT HAD BEEN SO *LONG*, WE'D BOTH LOST SO *MUCH* TO THE ALIEN.
WE BEGAN TO PICK UP CODED SIGNALS OVER THE RESTRICTED MILITARY CHANNELS AND REALIZED WE WERE NEARING OUR FINAL DESTINATION.
I WANTED THE NIGHTMARE TO BE OVER.
MAYBE THAT WAS MY *MISTAKE*. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE IT STARTED, I'D LET MYSELF *HOPE*.
B-34

THE ALIEN WOULD NEVER HAVE SHOWN SUCH *WEAKNESS*.
MAXWELL, DOWLING-- GET DOWN TO THIS CARGO HOLD AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN *SALVAGE*.
YOU *BASTARDS*. IF YOU'VE DAMAGED MY *SPECIMENS*, I'LL SEE YOU *HANG*.
WHAT THE--

DUMP THE INBOARD NAVIGATIONAL FILES INTO THE BASE SYSTEM--I WANT A TIME-CODED HARD COPY OF THE FLIGHT LOG IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.
LOG ON.
EYES ONLY.
(OVERRIDE CLEARANCE A1A REQUIRED)
MAJOR EUGENE POWELL, U.S.C.M.C.
:COF:
--THOSE THINGS ATTACKED US--
WE WERE LUCKY TO SURVIVE--
THAT'S NOT LUCK--THAT'S SEDITION!
IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS, I HAVE OPENED A DAILY LOG TO SUMMARIZE MY ASSESSMENT OF BASE COMMANDER SPEAR'S FITNESS FOR DUTY.
MY RED PEOPLE NEEDED THOSE SPECIMENS--IT WAS A CHANCE TO STUDY POSSIBLE MUTATIONS BROUGHT ON BY THE CREATURES' EXPOSURE TO MULTIPLE HUMAN STRAINS.
PUT THEM INTO ISOLATION--SUBCUTANEOUS MONITORS AND FULL-PRISM SPECTOGRAPHY--
IF THEY'RE INFECTED, WE MAY SALVAGE SOMETHING FROM THIS MISSION YET.
JESUS--DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? EARTH'S GONE--
I REALIZE THESE NOTES COULD BE CONSTRUED AS MUTINOUS--EVEN TRAITOROUS--
BUT IT HAS FALLEN TO ME TO KEEP SOME SORT OF RECORD.
YOU THINK YOU CAN CONTROL THEM? THAT'S WHAT THE OTHERS BELIEVED--
THAT'S WHAT THOSE THINGS DEPEND ON!
T. SPEARS

AT 0900 HOURS I RELIEVED LT. BAINBRIDGE AND TOOK OVER A DUTY OFFICER IN THE MAIN HABITAT. I OBSERVED GENERAL SPERRS ALONE, NEAR ONE OF THE CONTAINMENT VESSELS.
HE SEEMED TO BE WATCHING THEM.
AT 1023 HOURS, I OVERHEARD THE GENERAL MUTTER SOMETHING UNDER HIS BREATH. HE WAS SMILING AS HE SAID IT, REPEATING HIMSELF SEVERAL TIMES.
PERFECTION--
PERFECTION--

PERFECTION.
SPEARS


THE GENERAL'S BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN ERRATIC FOR MONTHS, BUT I NOTICED A MARKED CHANGE FOR THE WORSE WITH THE ARRIVAL OF THE CARGO VESSEL FROM EARTH.
TWO HUMANS AND A DAMAGED SYNTHETIC HAD COMMANDEERED THE SHIP AT LAUNCH. DURING THE VOYAGE THEY SOMEHOW DESTROYED A CLUSTER OF SPEARS' INCUBATING SPECIMENS.
I HAD NEVER SEEN THE GENERAL SO ANGRY--
--SO DISAPPOINTED.
THE STOWAWAYS LOST COMMUNICATIONS SOON AFTER LAUNCH AND HAD COME TO BELIEVE EARTH'S ALIEN PLAGUES HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY AN ALL-OUT NUCLEAR ATTACK.
NONE OF THAT WAS ANY CONCERN TO GENERAL SPEARS.

YOU--SCOF--YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH. JESUS, YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN TO ME--
SOUNDS LIKE THE OLD MAN'S HEARD ENOUGH--
I--I'M AFRAID, DADDY. THE MONSTERS MIGHT HEAR US--THEY MIGHT TRY TO HURT US, LIKE THEY HURT RICKY AND--
KEEP MOVING--
19F EARTH SAT
58 EARTH SAT
EARTH-SAT--!
SPEAR'S TECHIES HAVE BEEN MONITORING THE CIVILIAN SATELLITES SINCE WE ESTABLISHED THE BASE--
WHAT THE HELL KEEPS THEM OFF HARD DUTY--
THATS IMPOSSIBLE--! WE LOST CONTACT WITH EARTH DURING--
WHAT THE HELL--HARKER, GRAB THE GIRL--
DON'T LEAVE ME, DADDY--PLEASE!
21:53
20C EARTH SA

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS? THEY DIDN'T EVEN TALK TO US--FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED--
THEY'RE PRETENDING ALL THEIR MILITARY BULLSHIT STILL MATTERS.
:KAK KAK: I'VE KNOWN DOZENS OF OFFICERS LIKE SPEARS--THEY FIGURE THEIR RANK IS PROOF OF SOME DIVINE PURPOSE.
HIS MEN--THE TRUTH--NONE OF THAT COUNTS FOR SHIT. JUST POWER, 'COMMAND'--
HE HAS THAT LOOK IN HIS EYES--LIKE HE'S INVULNERABLE, IMMORTAL. LIFE, DEATH--IT'S ALL MEANINGLESS.
IT'S THE SAME FEELING I GET WHEN I SEE ONE OF THOSE THINGS.
THE GENERAL'S OBSESSION WITH THE ALIEN HAS CLOUDED HIS REASON. HE ANSWERS TO NO AUTHORITY BUT HIS OWN.
THE PRISONERS COULD HAVE PROVIDED IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT EARTH --ABOUT OUR FUTURE. INSTEAD, SPEARS HAS QUARANTINED THEM FOR USE AS ALIEN BREEDING STOCK.
SEC: 16.28
I'VE SEEN ENOUGH KILLING --IT HAS TO STOP. THE GENERAL HAS HIS LOYALISTS, BUT IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THERE IS OPEN REBELLION.
AND GOD HELP US WHEN IT STARTS... LOG OFF.

HOW MUCH DID YOU GET?
THREE DAYS' WORTH. SPEARS HAS BINDING TALLIES ON PERISHABLES BUT I MADE A DEAL WITH ONE OF THE SECOND LEVEL SUPPLY OFFICERS.
I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET OFF THIS ROCK--
OKAY, LET'S GO.
I FIGURE WE'VE GOT A FEW HOURS' GRACE WHILE SPEARS AND POWELL PLAY MAD DOCTOR WITH THE NEW ARRIVALS. IF WE CAN CLEAR THE SCOPES, WE MAY BE ABLE TO CONTACT THE CIVILIAN TERRAFORMING COLONY.
AND WHAT IF THE CIVILIANS DON'T FEEL LIKE TALKING?
THEN SPEARS WILL FIND US.
WE DON'T WANT THAT.
HEY, RENUS-- COMING TO KEEP ME COMPANY?
BETTER-- I'M RELIEVING YOU. SERGEANT DECKER WANTS YOU TO CHECK THE CIRCULATION PUMPS ON D LEVEL-- WE'RE SHOWING RED ON THREE CHAMBERS.
FIGURES THEY'D LET IT GO RED BEFORE BRINGING ME UP. GIVE ME A SECOND TO PUNCH UP THE WATCH COMMANDER AND--
SORRY, BOBBY.
PETERSON, GET THE DOOR.

CAN'T BREAK IT. SECURITY SEALS ALL AROUND.
SHIT.
ALL RIGHT. DOESN'T MATTER--WE'RE COMMITTED. SECURITY SWEEPS THE PERIMETER EVERY FOUR HOURS--WE'RE CLEAR UNTIL THEN--
I DON'T CARE IF WE HAVE FOUR SECONDS--ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN FACING THOSE THINGS.
SET.
BURN IT.
CHRIST, PETERSON, FORGET THE TRACTOR--GO FOR ONE OF THE SPEEDERS--
TOO DANGEROUS. LOW-LEVEL RADAR WOULD CLICK US BEFORE WE WERE TEN FEET OFF THE GROUND.
GIVE ME A MINUTE TO TRASH THE INBOARD ALARMS.
I'VE BEEN THINKING, MAN. EVEN IF WE MAKE IT TO THE TERRAFORMING COLONY, WHAT IF SPEARS--
FORGET SPEARS. WE'LL MAKE IT--
--WE'VE GOT TO.

THERE WAS NO SENSE OF *TIME* INSIDE OUR CELL. THE ONLY SOUND WAS THE HISS OF PROCESSED AIR, LIKE *BREATH* WHISTLING THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH.

WHY WERE WE STILL *ALIVE?*

OUR CAPTIVITY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH PUNISHMENT. IT WAS MORE THAN THAT.

I SAW IT IN THEIR COMMANDING OFFICER'S EYES. HE *WANTED* SOMETHING.

SOMETHING *MORE* THAN OUR LIVES--

SOMETHING *WORSE* THAN DEATH.

--ABOUT *TIME*, YOU BASTARDS--

I COULD HEAR A STRANGE ROARING, DISTANT AND ETHEREAL.

SOMETHING *WET* WAS PRESSING AGAINST MY LEGS.

I TRIED TO LIFT MY HEAD, BUT SHARP STRAPS WERE CUTTING INTO MY THROAT--

--AND THEN I HEARD MYSELF *SCREAM.*

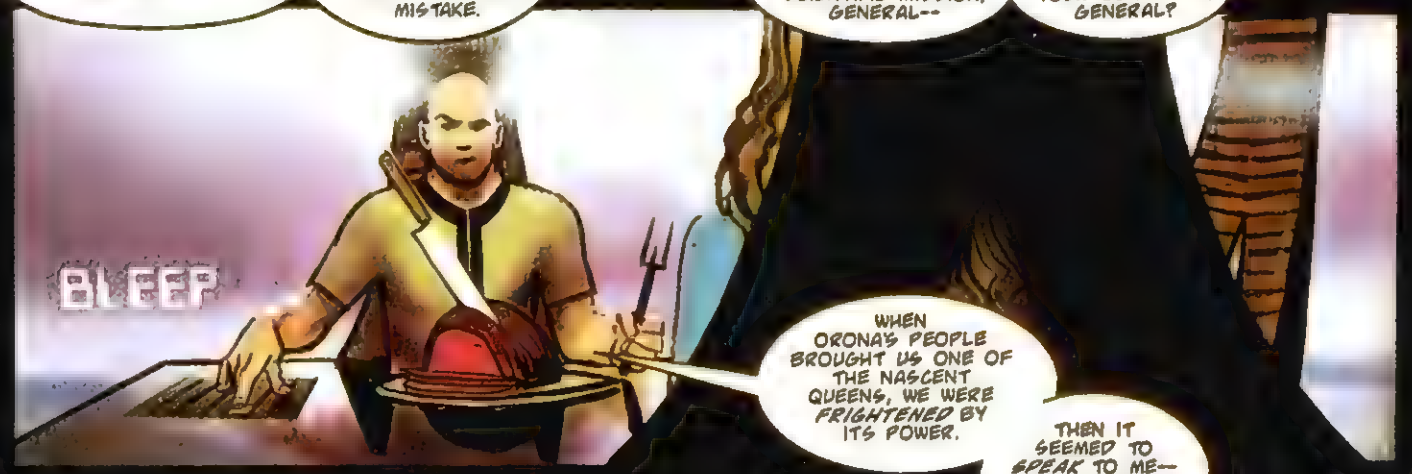
THEY NEEDED SPECIMENS.
SHE NEEDED ME.

NOOO!!!
GET IT OFF ME!

BILLIE--BILLIE--IT'S ALL RIGHT. I'M HERE.

I HOPE YOU LIKE YOUR MEAT RARE.
IT'S NOT REAL BEEF, OF COURSE--THE MESS SERGEANT PUT IT TOGETHER OUT OF PROTEIN PACKS AND THAT DAMNED SOY CONCENTRATE--BUT I THINK THE FLAVOR WILL SURPRISE YOU.

THE SERGEANT TELLS ME YOUR FRIENDS CALL YOU BILLIE. I HOPE WE CAN BE FRIENDS.
I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR ALL THAT'S HAPPENED. WE'VE ALL BEEN SUFFERING UNDER GREAT STRESS--IT'S EASY TO FORGET THE AMENITIES.
WHEN MAJOR POWELL BROUGHT YOUR SPECIAL ABILITIES TO MY ATTENTION, I REALIZED I HAD MADE A SERIOUS MISTAKE.
WE--WE NEVER INTENDED TO IMPEDE YOUR SCIENTIFIC MISSION, GENERAL--
WHAT EXACTLY IS YOUR OBJECTIVE, GENERAL?


BLEEP
WHEN ORONA'S PEOPLE BROUGHT US ONE OF THE NASCENT QUEENS, WE WERE FRIGHTENED BY ITS POWER.
THEN IT SEEMED TO SPEAK TO ME--AND AT ONCE I KNEW ITS TRUE BEAUTY.

LOOK AT THEM. LOOK AT THEM.
THE FOOLS ON EARTH WANTED TO ANNIHILATE THEM. NUCLEAR DEVASTATION--MY GOD. I COULDN'T PERMIT IT.
SERGEANT WILKS-- YOU FACED THE ALIEN ON ITS OWN SOIL AND SURVIVED.
HOW I ENVY YOU.
WE'RE SO FRAIL, SO WEAK COMPARED TO THEM.
THEY HAVE THE STRENGTH AND POWER OF TRUE SOLDIERS. THEY DEMONSTRATE AN UNQUESTIONING, UNSWERVING LOYALTY TO THEIR CAUSE.
ALL THEY LACK IS PROPER DIRECTION-- LEADERSHIP.
I CAN PROVIDE THAT. I CAN MAKE THEM INTO AN ARMY. I CAN USE THEM TO RECLAIM EARTH FROM THEIR BRETHREN.

YOUR CARGO SHIP WAS LADEN WITH SAMPLES OF THE EARTH-BRED ALIEN, BUT YOU'VE BLESSED US WITH SOMETHING *FAR* MORE VALUABLE.
YOUR EXPERIENCE. YOUR *EXPERTISE.*
GENERAL-- THE SENTRY ON THE NORTHERN ACCESS TIER HAS BEEN *MURDERED*-- ONE OF THE LAND TRACTORS IS MISSING.
DR. POWELL SUSPECTS AN AWOL CONTINGENT IS HEADING FOR THE CIVILIAN TERRAFORMING COLONY.
SON OF A *BITCH*--
I WANT A FULLY ARMED ASSAULT TEAM ON THE SPEEDER DECK IN *FIVE MINUTES.*
DO YOU UNDERSTAND *NOW!* THE FLESH IS *WEAK*--AFRAID OF WHAT IT DOESN'T *UNDERSTAND.*
WE CAN DO *BETTER.*
GIVE THEM THE RUN OF THE BASE-- BUT *WATCH* THEM.
CHICK

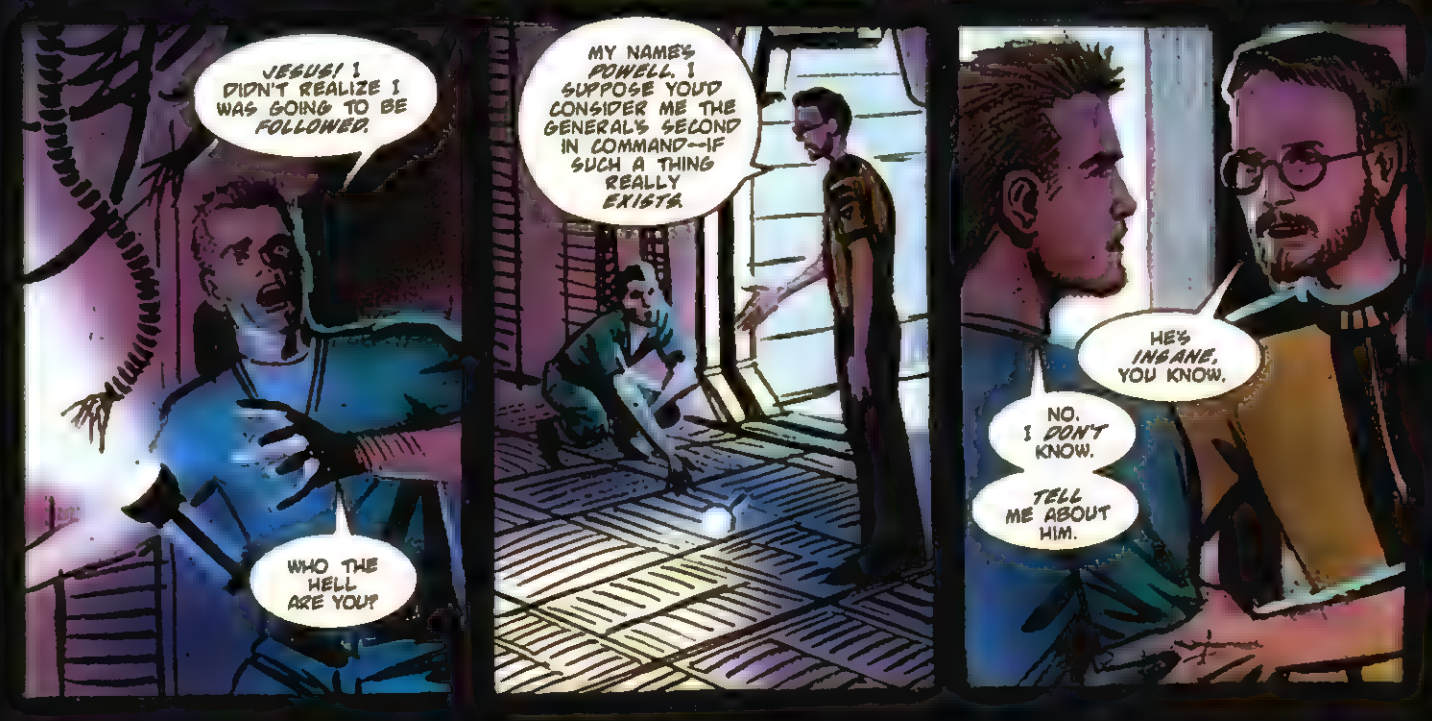
I FELT A TERRIBLE REALIZATION WASH OVER ME, STINGING AND BITTER. I WANTED TO BLAME THE *ALIENS* FOR THE DEVASTATION ON EARTH--BUT THE *TRUTH* WAS FAR WORSE.
THE ALIENS WERE ONLY A TOOL. *WE* WERE DESTROYING *OURSELVES*.
BILLIE, LISTEN TO ME. WE'RE ONLY ALIVE SO LONG AS SPEARS *NEEDS* US--
"--THERE'S SOMETHING I HAVE TO CHECK, THEN I'LL BE BACK."
302
THE AMERICAN
SPEARS HAD SET US FREE, BUT IT WAS A HOLLOW GESTURE--THERE WAS NOWHERE TO GO.
I THOUGHT OF *BUELLER*, LOST IN THE LABYRINTH OF THE COLONY. I WANTED THE REASSURANCE OF HIS FACE, HIS HANDS, HIS EYES--
INSTEAD I FOUND SOMEONE *ELSE*--SOMEONE I'D NEVER MET, BUT SOMEHOW INSTINCTIVELY *KNEW*--
HAVE A SEAT, WATCH THE SHOW. NUMBER 19, ONE OF OUR *STEADY* 'CUSTOMERS.'
THEY STILL BEAM SIGNALS 24 HOURS A DAY.

I STARED AT THE SCREEN. I SAW A LITTLE GIRL, HER FACE SMUDGED WITH DUST AND SMOKE.
WE'VE BEEN CLOCKING THESE *DIARY* TRANSMISSIONS SINCE THE MAINSTREAM STATIONS WENT DOWN. LOOKS LIKE SOME VIDEO TECHS GOT HOLD OF THE GROUND RELAY CODES AND TAPPED INTO THE MAIN TRANSMITTER.
I SAW A LITTLE GIRL...I SAW *MYSELF*.
IT'S--IT'S *WORST* AT NIGHT.
YOU CAN'T SEE THEM--YOU CAN ONLY HEAR THE *SCREAMS*--
PSSSHHHHHHHHH
KHEOP
MILITARY *BASTARDS*--

WE--WE USUALLY AVOID THE BUILDINGS--TOO MANY PLACES FOR THOSE THINGS TO HIDE--
'COURSE NOTHING'S REALLY SAFE ANYMORE--
I DON'T WANT TO RUN ANYMORE--I WANT TO GO HOME.
I KNOW YOU DO, HONEY--THAT'S ALL ANY OF US WANTS.
UNCLE?
SHIT! IT'S OKAY, AMY--WE'RE ALL RIGHT--
I USED TO THINK THEY WERE FLYING RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS--NOW I THINK THEY'RE JUST HAVING FUN.
DAMN! WE'VE GOT TO FIND BETTER COVER--
WE'LL LOSE THE UPLINK INSIDE, BUT WE CAN'T RISK THE STREET WITH THESE GODDAMN ASSAULT SHIPS ON THE RAMPAGE--
THAT'S IT. LOST THEM.
I CAN'T FIGURE WHY THEY'RE STILL KEEPING UP THE RUSE--YOU KNOW, PRETENDING SOMEONE'S WATCHING--PRETENDING SOMEONE EVEN CARES--
MAYBE IT'S ALL THEY HAVE LEFT--

B701
THERE IT IS--THE MAIN COMMUNICATIONS BUNDLE.

THE ALIEN MUST HAVE *CUT* IT WHEN IT *ESCAPED*--
--THEN SPEARS WAS *RIGHT*.
THE GENERAL IS *ALWAYS* RIGHT. YOU'D BEST GROW *ACCUSTOMED* TO IT.


JESUS! I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS GOING TO BE *FOLLOWED*.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
MY NAME'S *POWELL*. I SUPPOSE YOU'D CONSIDER ME THE GENERAL'S SECOND IN COMMAND--IF SUCH A THING REALLY *EXISTS*.
HE'S *INSANE*, YOU KNOW.
NO. I *DON'T* KNOW.
TELL ME ABOUT HIM.

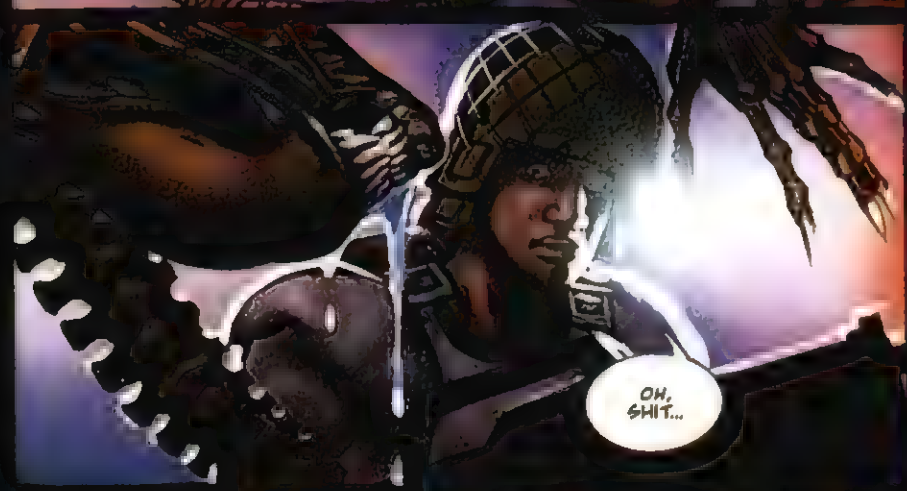
I FIGURED SPEARS WOULD HAVE BEEN ALL OVER US BY NOW.
IT'S THE TERRAFORMERS THAT WORRY ME. WE'RE MILITARY. THEY MAY NOT BE VERY HAPPY TO SEE US.
SOMETHING'S WRONG. I'M NOT GETTING ANY SIGNALS--NOT EVEN THE STANDARD BEACON--
THEY ZEROED THEIR BEACON WEEKS AGO. SPEARS COULD HAVE USED IT TO HOME IN AND FLASH THEIR COLONY WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT.
MAYBE--MAYBE WE COULD GET SOME SORT OF ASYLUM? YOU KNOW, LIKE POLITICAL PRISONERS?
YEAH. AND AFTER THAT WE CAN RUN FOR PRESIDENT.
CHRIST, PETERSON--WE'RE AWOL. WE DON'T NEED ASYLUM. WE NEED A SHIP--AND I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET ONE.
I DON'T LIKE THIS, MAN. WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN SOMEONE BY NOW.
GIVE IT A REST, MAGRUDER. HALF THE STATION IS AUTOMATED--IN THIS WEATHER I'D BE SURPRISED TO SEE GODDAMNED ANYONE OUTSIDE.

THE LAUNCH BAY'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FACILITY-- PEACE AND QUIET ONLY MAKE IT EASIER.
JUST KEEP MOVING. I DON'T LIKE THIS--I DON'T LIKE ANY OF--
SOME-THING'S UP THERE.
JESUS, NOW YOU'RE GETTING TO ME.
WAIT A MINUTE--
THIS SURFACE-- IT-IT'S NOT LIKE THE REST. IT'S ALMOST ORGANIC--
FORGET ABOUT IT. LET'S JUST GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE--

IT'S-- IT'S PIECES OF THOSE ALIEN THINGS-- DISSOLVED TOGETHER INTO A SOLID MASS--
--LIKE SOME SORT OF--

--HIVE--

BRAAAAAF


OH, SHIT...

AAAAAHHHHH!!!!

OH MY GOD.
...THEY'RE EVERYWHERE.

WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THE CHAMBER.
MAGRUDER-- GET READY WITH A GRENADE!
READY!
UUUkk!
CLICK
5...4...3...2...1
NO!

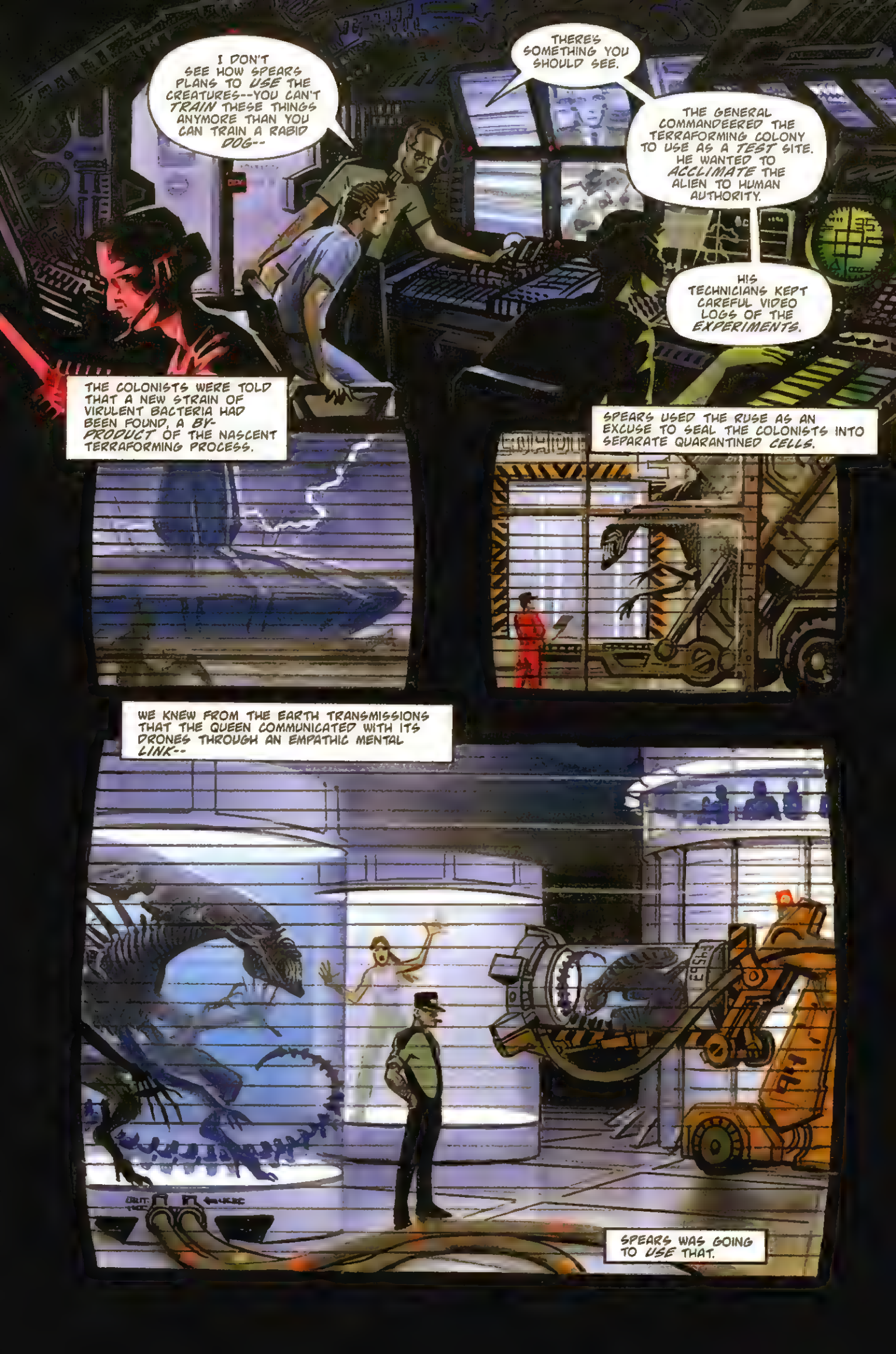
KABOOM
YOU WANT ME--
COME AND GET ME--
WHAT THE--
EAT THIS.
EEEEEEEAAAGGHH!!

GAYYGGG--
GET-- IT--OFF-- ME--
EEGGGHHH!
UGHHHKK--
YOU FILTHY TRAITOR. WE WERE WORKING TOWARD SOMETHING BETTER--SOMETHING STRONGER.
--AND ALL YOU COULD DO WAS TRY AND DESTROY IT.
WE NEEDED TO SIMULATE HUMAN BREEDING CONDITIONS TO GET VIABLE TEST RESULTS.
THE TERRAFORMERS FOUGHT US AT FIRST, BUT EVENTUALLY THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THE GREATER GOOD.
HE- HELLLLP MEEE--
LOOK AT YOU. SO PATHETIC. SO WEAK.
MAKES ME FEEL GOOD TO HEAR YOU BEG.
NO-- DON'T PUT ME BACK IN THERE WITH THEM--
NOOOOOOOOOOAAGGHH!

WHEN I JOINED THE MARINES, I WAS PROUD TO SERVE MY COUNTRY. THEY *WANT* THAT--THEY WANT YOU TO THINK YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING *RIGHT* AND *NOBLE*.
SOMETIMES YOU *BELIEVE* IT. SOMETIMES IT'S EVEN *TRUE*.
THE AMERICAN
HE'S *INSANE*, YOU KNOW.
SPEARS THINKS HE CAN TURN THE ALIEN AGAINST ITS OWN KIND.
POWELL WAS SECOND IN COMMAND, REPORTING DIRECTLY TO GENERAL SPEARS. HE HAD FOLLOWED ME INTO THE LOWER DECKS OF MY STRANDED CARGO SHIP BECAUSE HE *NEEDED* ME.
HE'S TAKEN THE CIVILIAN TERRAFORMING BASE AND TURNED IT INTO A *BREEDING* STATION. ALL THE COLONISTS ARE *DEAD*. ONLY A FEW OF US KNOW THE TRUTH.
SPEARS *BELIEVED*, AND THE *PURITY* OF HIS BELIEF WAS *TERRIFYING*.
NO ONE IS SAFE. SPEARS HAS WIRED THE ENTIRE COMPOUND--HIS STAFF *MONITORS* THE SENIOR OFFICERS 24 HOURS A *DAY*.
NO.
EVERY FEW DAYS, SOMEONE *DISPLEASES* HIM. THEY JUST--*DISAPPEAR*--
I UNDERSTOOD COMPLETELY. IN MANY WAYS I *SHARED* THE INTENSITY OF THE GENERAL'S VISION.
WE HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO *STOP* HIM--BEFORE THE MADNESS GOES TOO *FAR*.

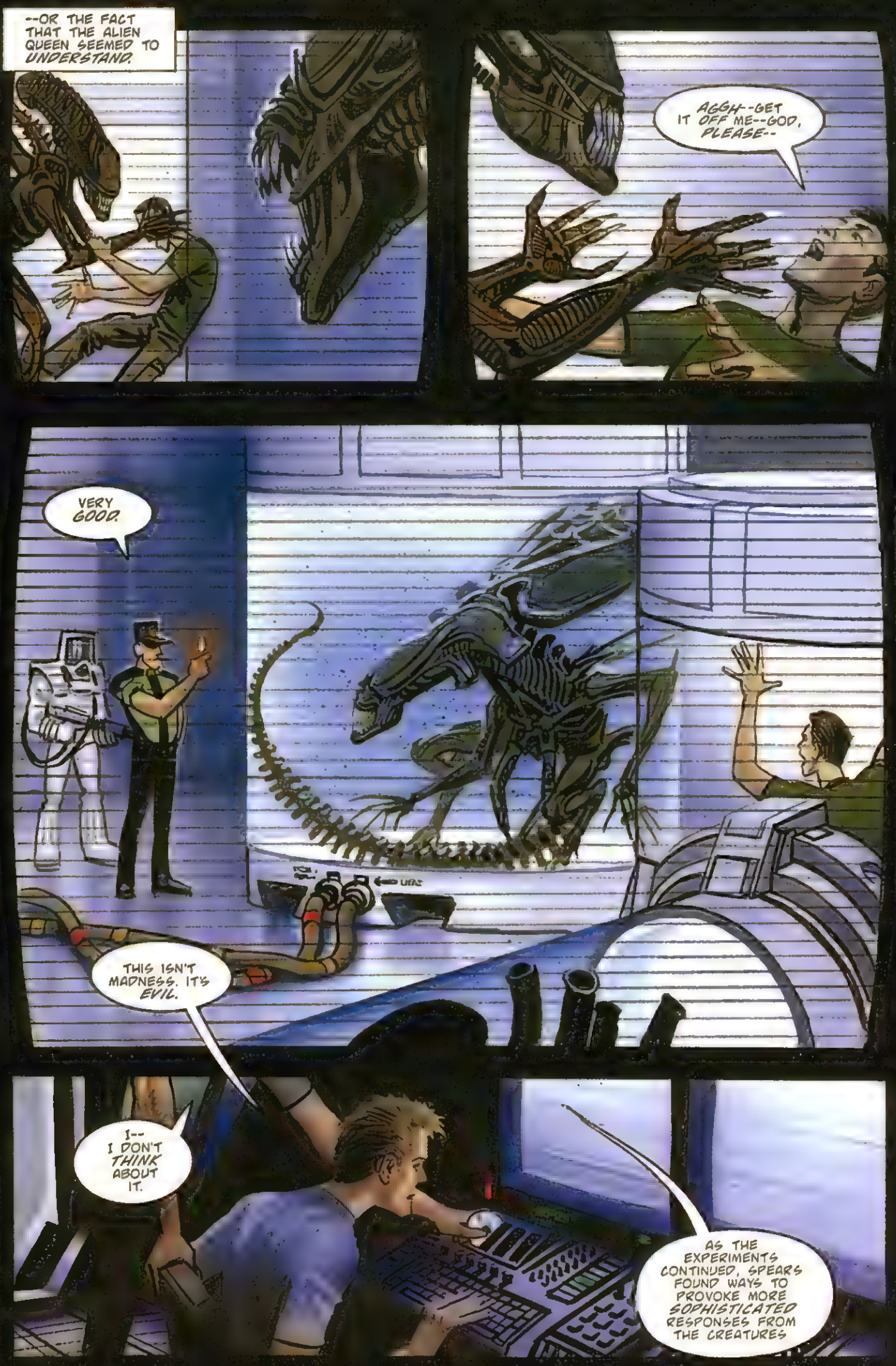
MEDICAL TYPES LOOK AT INSANITY LIKE SOME SORT OF DISEASE, BUT I THINK IT'S MORE MECHANICAL THAN THAT. LIKE A BROKEN CONNECTION, OR A MALFUNCTIONING COMPUTER CHIP.
LIFE, THOUGHT, EMOTION--JUST ELECTRICAL PULSES PASSING BETWEEN DIFFERENT LOBES OF THE BRAIN.
GENERAL. WE'VE FOUND A NEW QUEEN IN THE LOWER LEVEL, NEAR THE UNDERGROUND ACCESS TUBES. WE'RE SENDING IN A PROBE TO MEASURE THE SIZE OF THE--
WHEN SOMETHING MECHANICAL FAILS, YOU DON'T WASTE TIME WITH PSYCHOLOGY. YOU EITHER REPAIR IT--OR YOU REPLACE IT.
I KNEW I'D HAVE TO KILL HIM.

SIR-- GET AWAY FROM THE EGGS! THEY'RE DANGEROUS--
DON'T BE AFRAID, SON-- THEY DON'T WANT TO HURT US.
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?
WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? THOSE THINGS--
SHUT UP, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE-- HE MIGHT HEAR YOU--
I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE BORN INTO PAIN. I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST PRODUCTS OF THE MILITARY'S BIRTHING PROGRAM.
S-SIR--WE SHOULD START BACK TO THE MAIN FACILITY. ROBINSON'S PREDICTING A FORCE 10 STORM WITHIN THE HOUR.
GESTATED OUTSIDE THE WOMB, NURSED INSIDE A STERILE BREEDER, THE GENETICISTS DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD MATTER--
--THEY TOOK AWAY THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES US REAL-- SOMETHING THE ALIEN CREATURES SHARE ABOVE ALL ELSE--
--THE BOND OF FLESH--


I DON'T SEE HOW SPEARS PLANS TO *USE* THE CREATURES--YOU CAN'T *TRAIN* THESE THINGS ANYMORE THAN YOU CAN TRAIN A RABID *DOG*--
THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD SEE.
THE GENERAL COMMANDEERED THE TERRAFORMING COLONY TO USE AS A *TEST* SITE. HE WANTED TO *ACCLIMATE* THE ALIEN TO HUMAN AUTHORITY.
HIS TECHNICIANS KEPT CAREFUL VIDEO LOGS OF THE *EXPERIMENTS*.
THE COLONISTS WERE TOLD THAT A NEW STRAIN OF VIRULENT BACTERIA HAD BEEN FOUND, A *BY-PRODUCT* OF THE NASCENT TERRAFORMING PROCESS.
SPEARS USED THE RUSE AS AN EXCUSE TO SEAL THE COLONISTS INTO SEPARATE QUARANTINED *CELLS*.
WE KNEW FROM THE EARTH TRANSMISSIONS THAT THE QUEEN COMMUNICATED WITH ITS DRONES THROUGH AN EMPATHIC MENTAL *LINK*--
SPEARS WAS GOING TO *USE* THAT.

THE LESSONS BEGAN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.
NO--
AAOCGHHHHH!
YOU NEVER FORGET THE SCREAMS-- NEVER--
NO-- GOD, NO--!
THAT'S ENOUGH. BURN IT.
SKRE

HE FORCED THE QUEEN TO WATCH AS HE BURNED ITS CHILDREN.
SKREEEEEEEE
WHAM
OVER HERE!
NO.
AS THE SESSIONS CONTINUED, I'M NOT SURE WHAT WAS MORE FRIGHTENING--GENERAL SPEARS AND HIS METHODS--

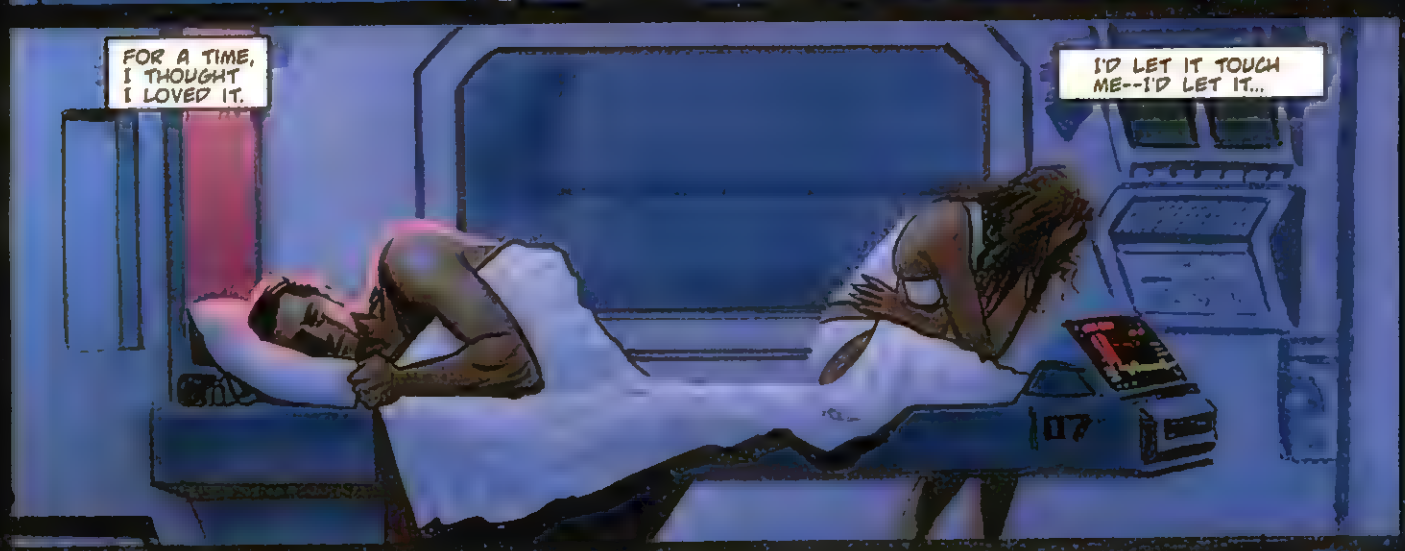

--OR THE FACT THAT THE ALIEN QUEEN SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND.
AGGH--GET IT OFF ME--GOD, PLEASE--
VERY GOOD.
THIS ISN'T MADNESS. IT'S EVIL.
I-- I DON'T THINK ABOUT IT.
AS THE EXPERIMENTS CONTINUED, SPEARS FOUND WAYS TO PROVOKE MORE SOPHISTICATED RESPONSES FROM THE CREATURES

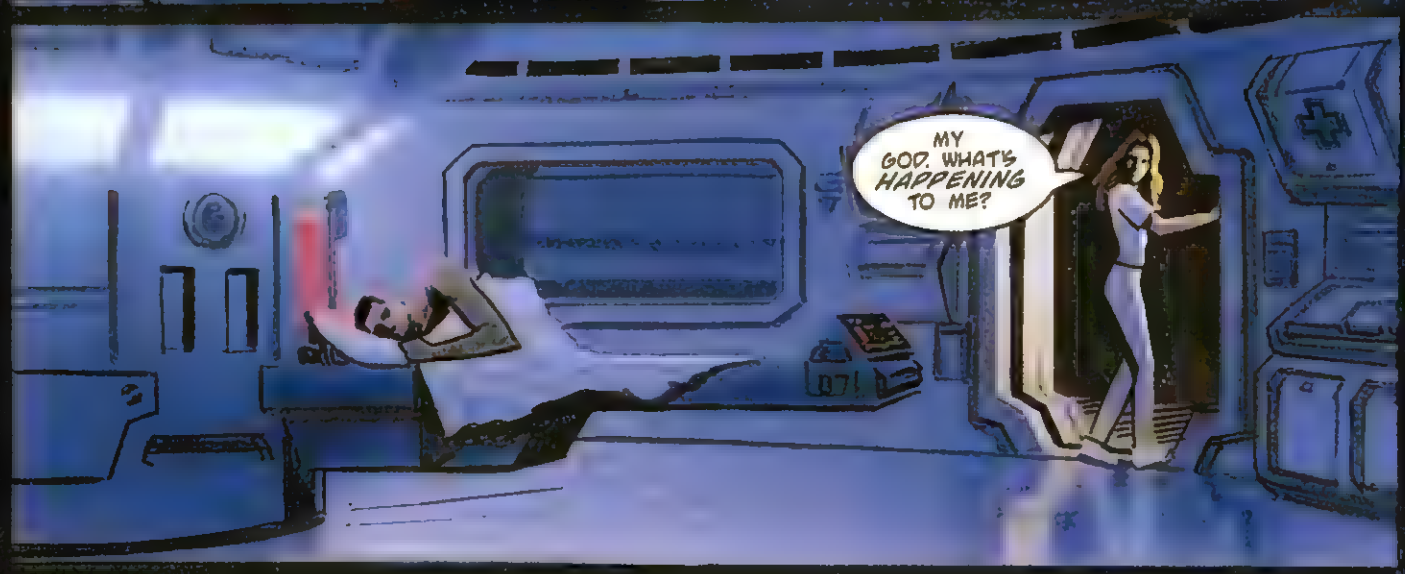
HE WANTED TO MAKE THE THINGS INTO SOLDIERS-- HE WANTED THEM TO FOLLOW ORDERS LIKE ANY OTHER GRUNT.
UGK
EEEEEAAAAHHHHHHHHH
THERE WERE MISSTEPS ALONG THE WAY, BUT SPEARS DEALT WITH THEM AS HE DEALT WITH ANY EXTRANEOUS INTERFERENCE.
DON'T PLAY GAMES WITH ME, DAMN IT--!
I'LL BURN EVERY ONE OF YOUR PRECIOUS CHILDREN UNTIL YOU LEARN RESPECT--!
AHHHH

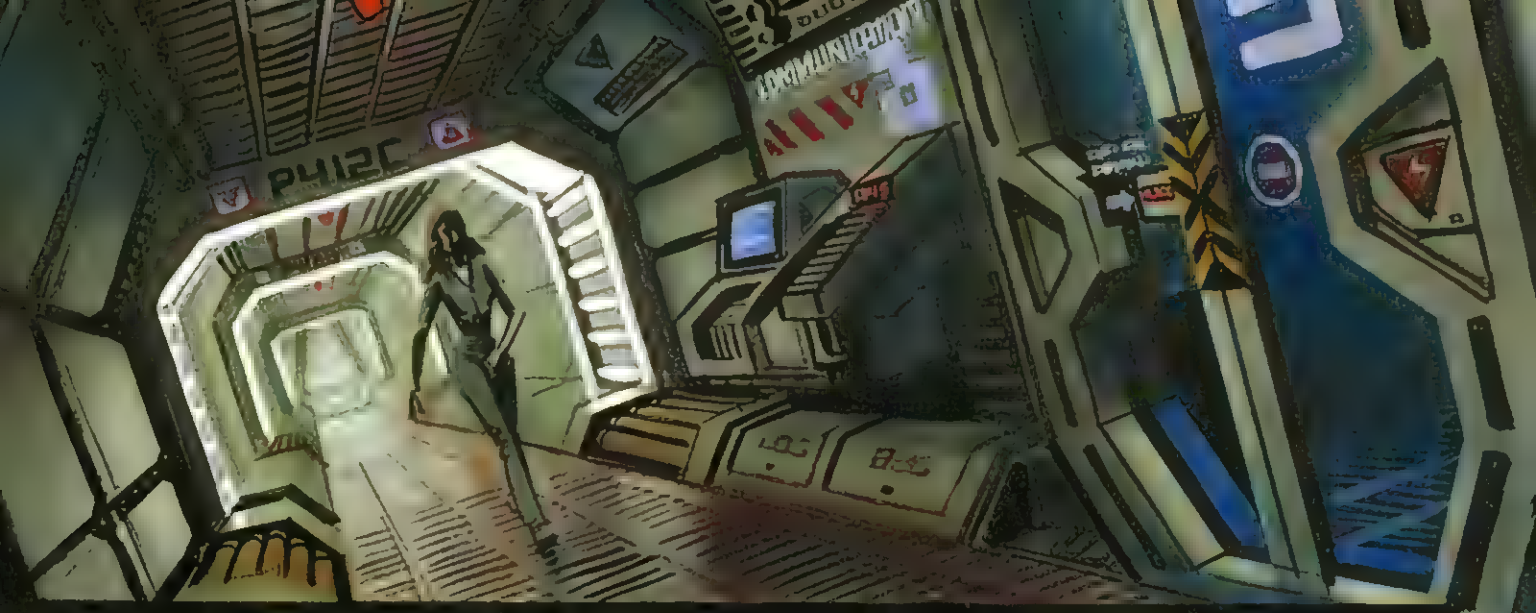
AS THE SESSIONS CONTINUED, SPEARS REMOVED SELECTED DRONES FROM THEIR PHYSICAL PROXIMITY TO THE QUEEN AND BROUGHT THEM BACK TO THE MAIN BASE.
HE WANTED TO BE NEAR THEM--HELP PREPARE THEM FOR THEIR JOURNEY TO EARTH.
PREPARE THEM FOR HIS WAR.
YOUR PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MONITORING EARTH TRANSMISSIONS FOR WEEKS. EARTH'S GONE--OVERRUN BY THOSE DAMNED THINGS.
SPEARS MUST KNOW THAT.
THIS ISN'T ABOUT EARTH. IT'S MORE THAN THAT--SOMETHING TO DO WITH SPEARS AND THE CREATURES--
THE GENERAL'S PARTY IS GOING TO BE DELAYED BY A STORM OUTSIDE THE TERRA-FORMING COLONY. FIVE HOURS--MAYBE SIX.
YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE, DAMMIT! SPEARS IS ALREADY LOADING THOSE THINGS INTO THE TRANSPORT VESSELS.
WE WON'T BE ALONE--
FIVE HOURS. NOT MUCH TIME.
THERE'S A WORD FOR WHAT WE'RE DISCUSSING--
YES. SURVIVAL.

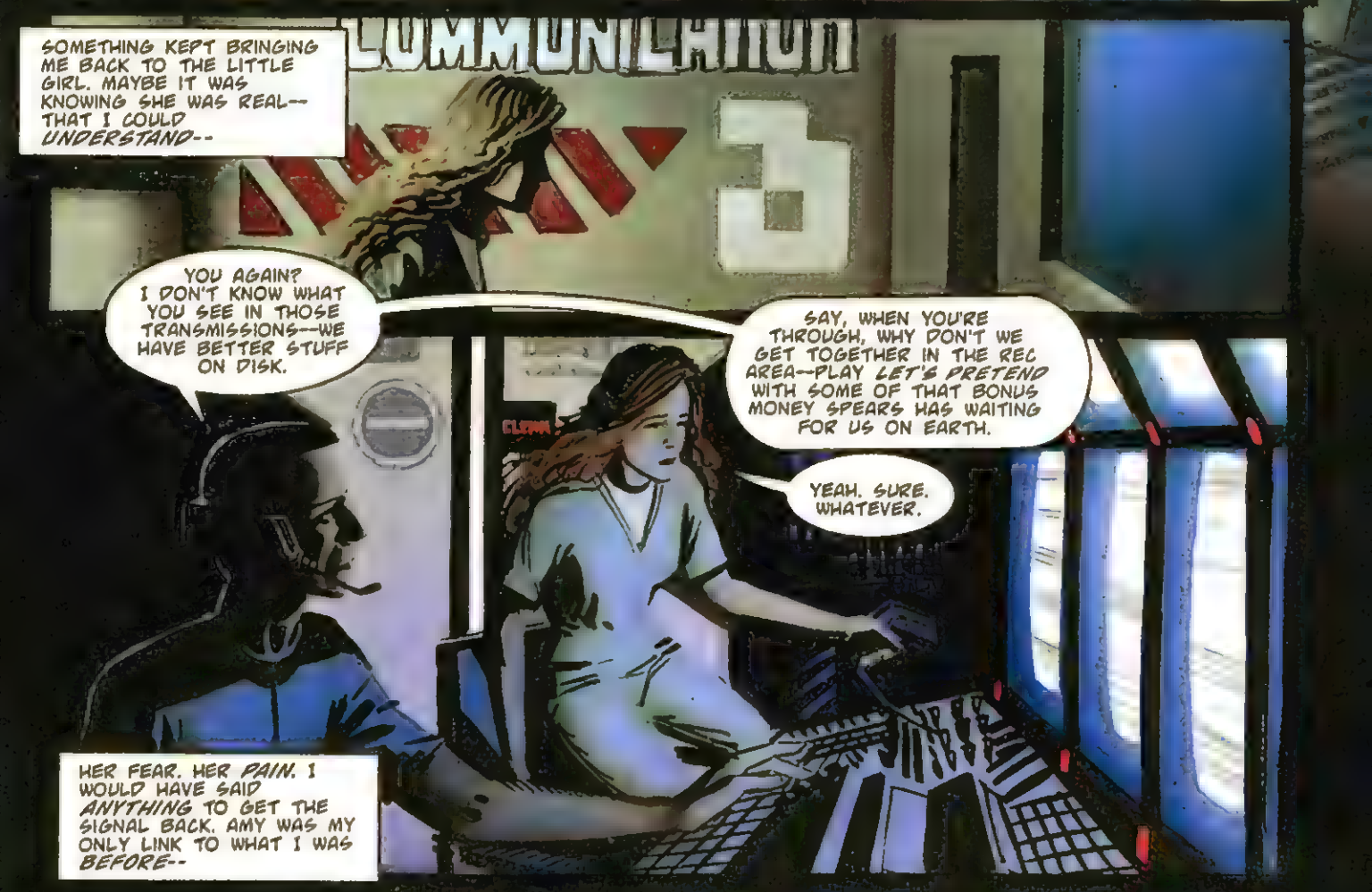
I WOKE EARLY, WATCHING BUELLER SLEEP. FOR A MOMENT I IMAGINED HE WAS *DREAMING*--

BUT BUELLER WAS AN ANDROID. HIS 'SLEEP' HAD BEEN *PROGRAMMED*--HIS HUMAN FUNCTIONS WERE THERE TO *CAMOUFLAGE* HIS TRUE NATURE. WHAT WAS I WATCHING, *REALLY?* HOW MANY HOURS OF *STUDY* HAD GONE INTO THE SOFT PURR OF BREATH, THE SLOW RISE OF NONEXISTENT LUNGS?


FOR A TIME, I THOUGHT I LOVED IT.
I'D LET IT TOUCH ME--I'D LET IT...

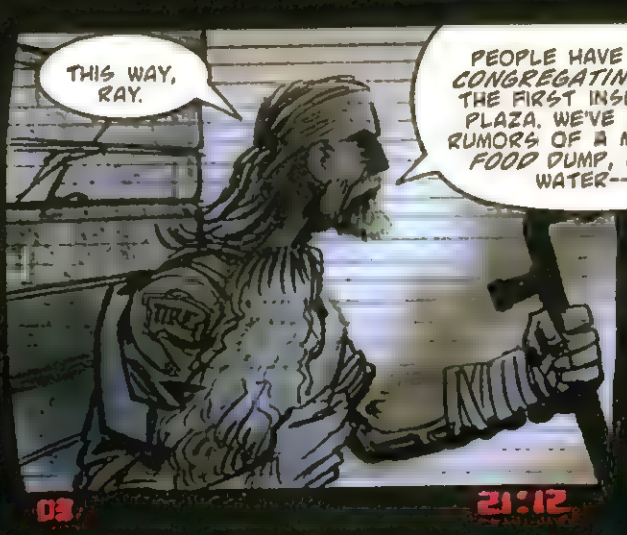

MY GOD. WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO ME?

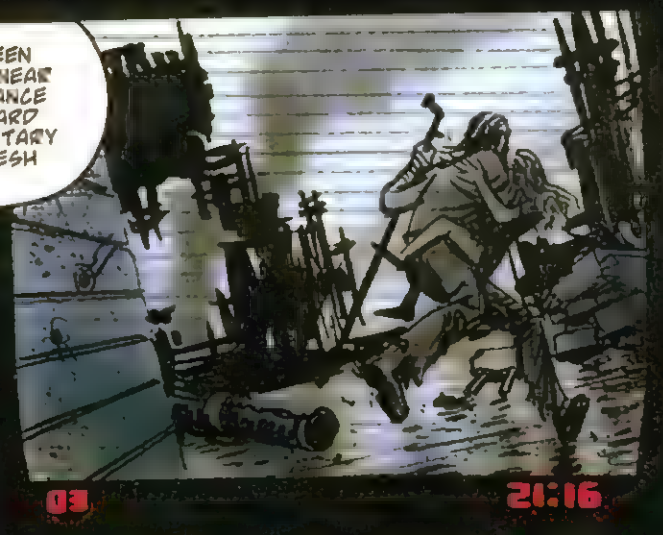



SOMETHING KEPT BRINGING ME BACK TO THE LITTLE GIRL. MAYBE IT WAS KNOWING SHE WAS REAL--THAT I COULD *UNDERSTAND*--
YOU AGAIN? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU SEE IN THOSE TRANSMISSIONS--WE HAVE BETTER STUFF ON DISK.
SAY, WHEN YOU'RE THROUGH, WHY DON'T WE GET TOGETHER IN THE REC AREA--PLAY *LET'S PRETEND* WITH SOME OF THAT BONUS MONEY SPEARS HAS WAITING FOR US ON EARTH.
YEAH. SURE. WHATEVER.
HER FEAR. HER *PAIN*. I WOULD HAVE SAID *ANYTHING* TO GET THE SIGNAL BACK. AMY WAS MY ONLY LINK TO WHAT I WAS *BEFORE*--

UNCLE BURT, I'M SCARED--IT'S GETTING *DARK* AGAIN--
--BEFORE IT ALL HAD *DIED*--
03
21:06

--GETTING MORE DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN THE UPLINK. ONCE THE CREATURES DESTROY THE RELAY STATION WE'LL BE CUT OFF--
--WE'LL KEEP TRANSMITTING--UNTIL--
03
21:08

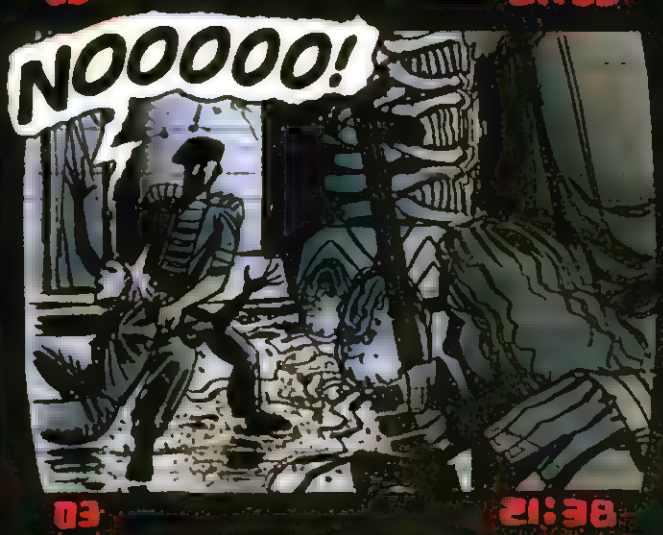

THIS WAY, RAY.
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONGREGATING NEAR THE FIRST INSURANCE PLAZA. WE'VE HEARD RUMORS OF A MILITARY FOOD DUMP, FRESH WATER--
03
21:12


03
21:16

HOLD IT, HOLD IT--
03
21:24

JESUS-- DO YOU HEAR THAT?
03
21:30

03
21:33


NOOOOO!
03
21:38

OH MY GOD.
03
21:41

DON'T BE AFRAID OF HER--JOIN HER--
03
21:43

03
21:45
CAN'T YOU SEE? SHE LOVES YOU-- SHE LOVES ALL OF US--

YOU'RE ONLY MAKING IT HARDER-- ONCE SHE JOINS WITH YOU, THERE'S NO MORE PAIN--
--ONLY THE PEACE THAT COMES FROM BEING WITH GOD--
03
21:48

DON'T BE AFRAID-- SHE ONLY WANTS TO TOUCH YOU.
03
21:49

UNCLE BURT--!
03
21:52

AMY--GET AWAY!
TRANS. OFF
21:56

03

OH JESUS-- THEY'VE DROPPED DOWN BEHIND US--
UNCLE BURT--UNCLE BURT--
03
21:59

KEEP HER SAFE, RAY--DON'T LET THEM TAKE HER!
SOMEBODY HELP US--
--PLEASE--
03
22:00

AMY!

K-CHUNK
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDA
WHA--?
NOBODY MOVES!
BILLIE-- GET OVER HERE.
WHAT THE HELL--
GENERAL SPEARS IS ON HIS WAY BACK FROM THE TERRAFORMING COLONY. ONCE HE ARRIVES, MAJOR POWELL AND I WILL RELIEVE HIM OF HIS COMMAND.
POWELL WILL BE HANDLING COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE OBSERVATION DECK--
KZZLLLLT
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR?

POWELL HAS HIS MEN INSIDE THE LOADING BAY, WAITING FOR THE GENERAL'S TRANSPORT. WE HAVE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, BUT--
--BUT SPEARS WILL DIE BEFORE HE GIVES UP HIS COMMAND.
THIS IS BULLSHIT. THE GENERAL WAS GOING TO TAKE CARE OF US WHEN THIS WAS ALL OVER--
YOU'RE BLOWING IT, MAN--
SHUT UP AND KEEP MOV--
TWAK
BRAFFFF
TSH TSH TSH
SCREW YOU AND YOUR GIRLFRIEND.

I WANT WHAT'S MINE--
KRAC
KSSSH
AGGHHYYGG--!
SSLLGGG
HHH
AAC
EVERYBODY OUT!
GGHH
SEAL THE DOOR!
MESS
WHUMP
THE BITCH WANTS OUT. THEY ALL WANT OUT.
EVEL 2B..... SECURITY ALERT LEVEL 2B.....

KRAAAK
C'MON, BILLIE-- MOVE IT!
BUDDA BUDDA
KEEEEEEEEEE
KISS THIS, YOU UGLY BASTARD--!

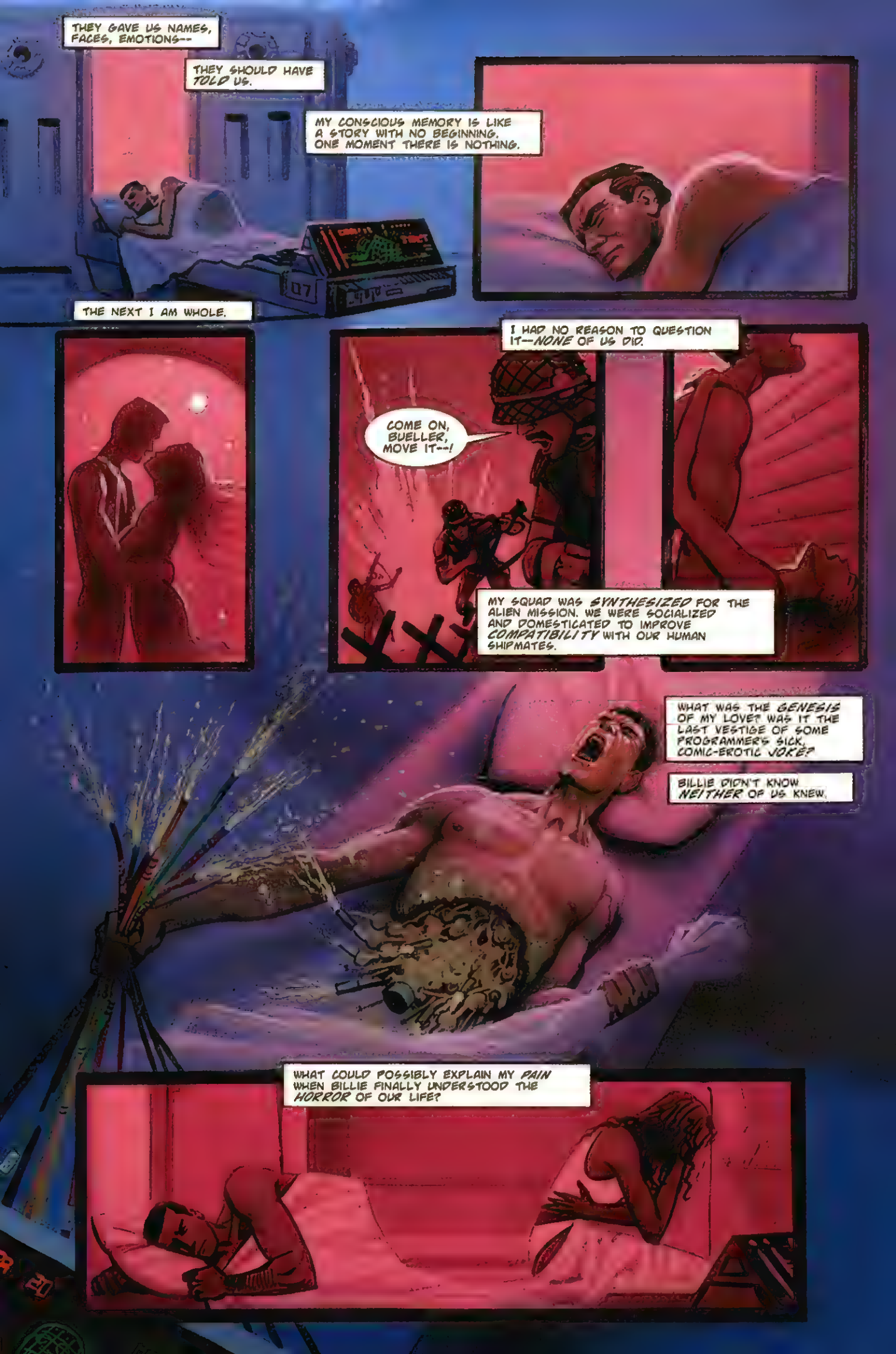
SOMETHING'S STRANGE HERE, GENERAL.
MAJOR POWELL'S HANDLING THE APPROACH INSTEAD OF SERGEANT KELLNER, AND THE STANDARD ACCESS CHANNELS HAVE GONE DEAD. WE--
JESUS, SIR-- I'M GETTING AN AUTOMATIC ALARM ON THE CENTRAL HOLDING FACILITY--
THERE-- THERE'S BEEN A BREECH--
KCHICK
BREAK OFF OUR APPROACH AND WAIT FOR MY INSTRUCTIONS.
DIDN'T FIGURE IT WOULD BE POWELL--BUT WHAT THE HELL... WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY--
DAMN-- HE'S VEERING OFF--
HE KNOWS--

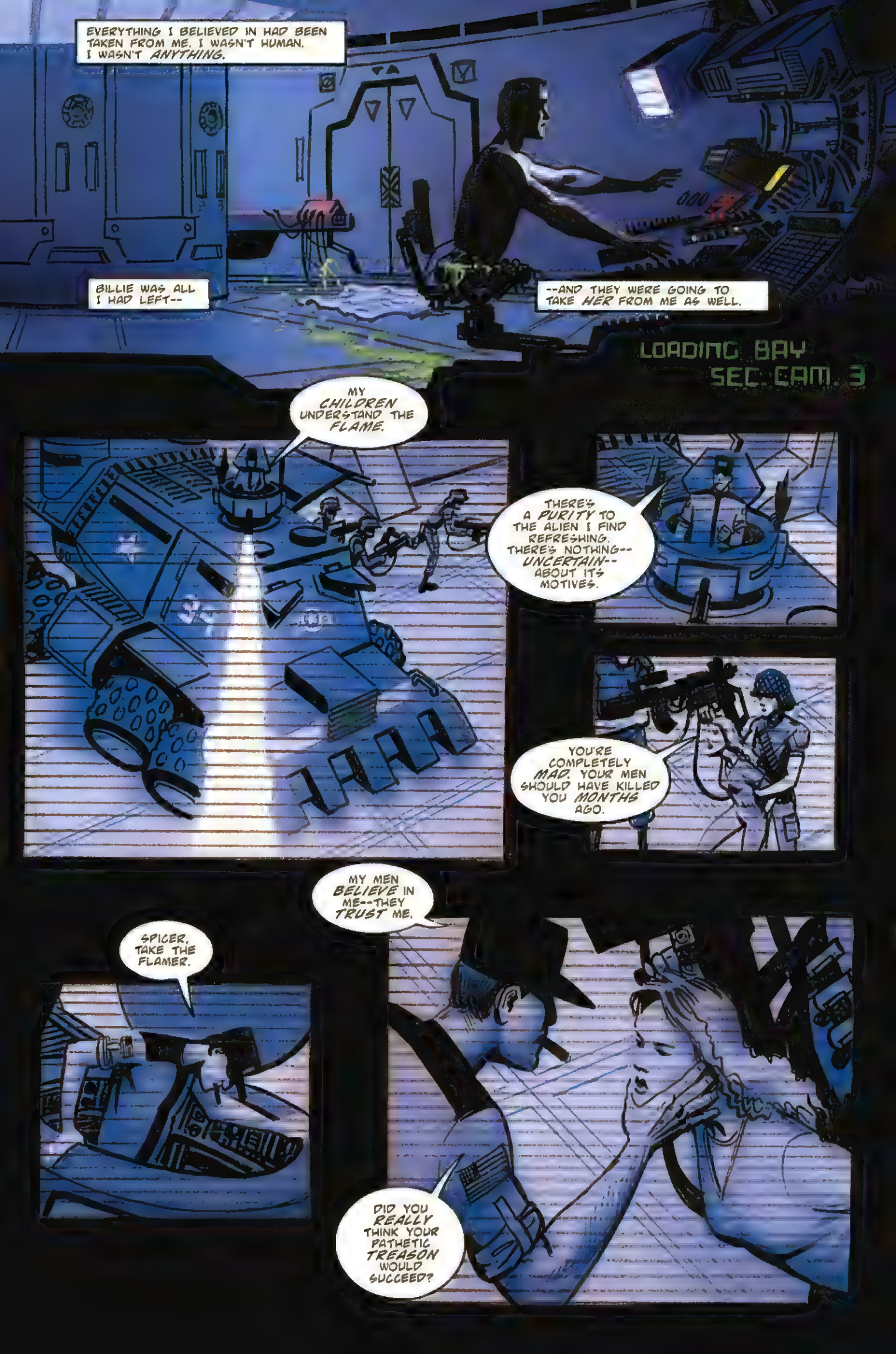
WE HAVE TO GET TO THE DOCKING BAY. POWELL'S ALREADY IN POSITION, AND THE--
MY GOD, WILKS--WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?
BUDDA BUDDA BU
SKREEEEEEEEEEE
THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED US FOR A FEW CREDITS-- THE GENERAL'S PROMISES OF GLORY--
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
SCREW 'EM.
LOADING BAY
08
SHIT, THEY'RE SPREADING OUT ACROSS THE BASE--!
JUST LIKE BEFORE-- RIM, EARTH--
YOU NEVER STOP THEM--
BUDDA BUDDA
BU
--YOU ONLY SURVIVE--
CLICK!

NOOOOO!
BOOM
KREEEK
THOSE THINGS ARE INSIDE THE BASE, WE--
WILKS, LISTEN TO ME--SPEARS KNOWS--HIS GROUND TRANSPORT DISAPPEARED OFF SCREEN. HE MUST BE JAMMING THE SIGNAL SO HE CAN--
FORGET SPEARS.
WE HAVE TO PROGRAM ONE OF THE GRAVITY DRIVE TRANSPORTS FOR LAUNCH--WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE, NOW--
CHRIST-- IT TAKES HOURS TO PROGRAM A LAUNCH!

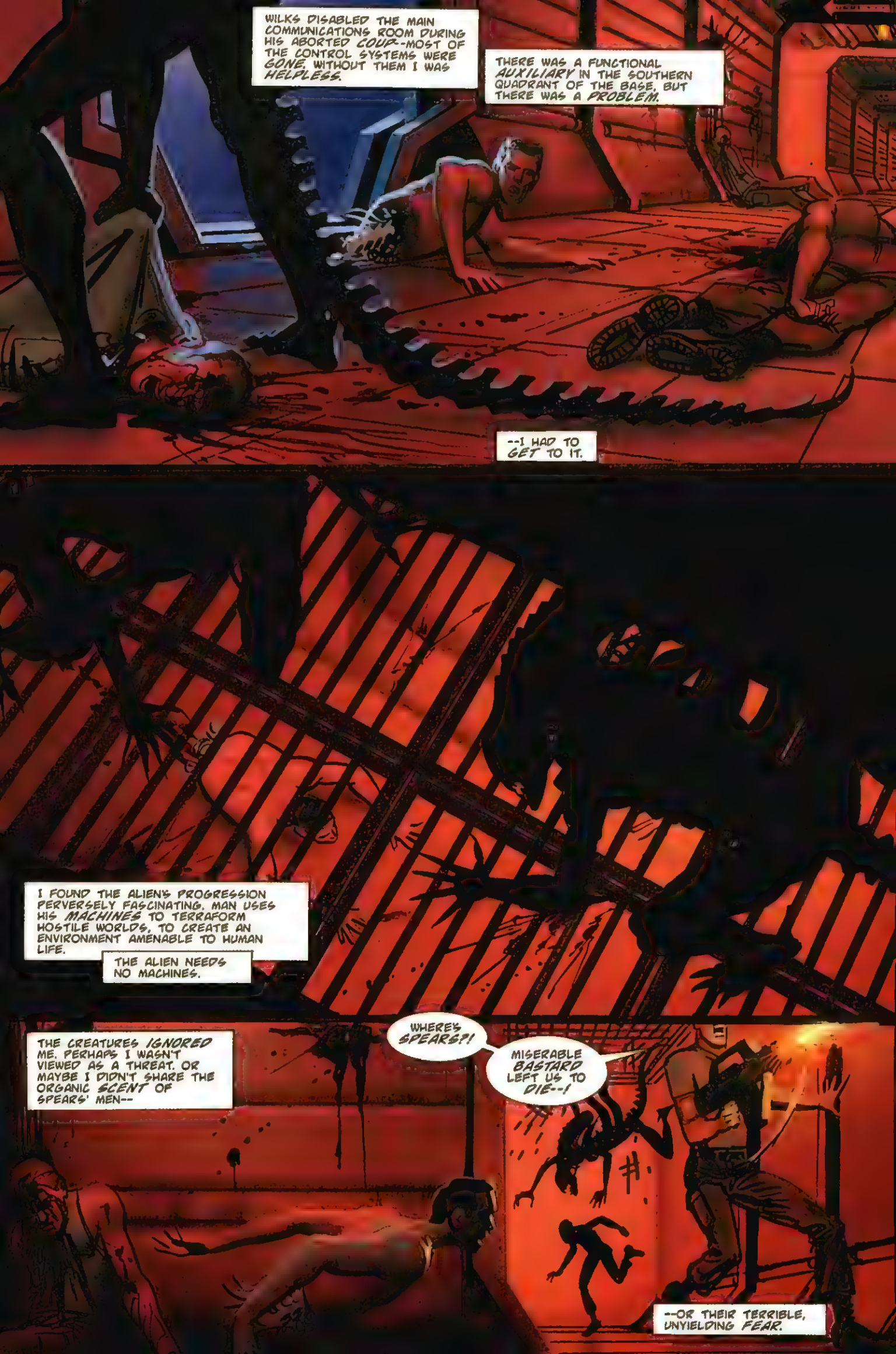
I WANTED TO BE BRAVE--I WANTED TO PRETEND THAT MY DEATH WOULD MEAN SOMETHING.
SHORT BURSTS--CONSERVE YOUR AMMUNITION--
--SAVE THE LAST ROUNDS FOR YOURSELF.
--BUT THE TIME FOR SELF-DECEPTION HAD PASSED.
BRATTT
I TRIED TO REMEMBER MY MOTHER AND FATHER. I TRIED TO REMEMBER THEIR LOVE--BUT COULDN'T. IT WAS ALL SO LONG AGO, SO DISTANT--
--THEN I THOUGHT OF BUELLER, AND I BEGAN TO CRY--
COME ON, DAMN IT--LETS FINISH IT--
KERRAAAAHHHH!!!

CEASE FIRE--OR I'LL FRY YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
THEY UNDERSTAND THE FLAME.
I'M THEIR NEW MASTER.
PREPARE THE TRAITORS FOR EXECUTION. THEN READY THE TRANSPORTS FOR OUR JOURNEY BACK TO EARTH--
IT'S TIME.


THEY GAVE US NAMES, FACES, EMOTIONS--
THEY SHOULD HAVE *TOLD* US.
MY CONSCIOUS MEMORY IS LIKE A STORY WITH NO BEGINNING. ONE MOMENT THERE IS NOTHING.
THE NEXT I AM WHOLE.
I HAD NO REASON TO QUESTION IT--*NONE* OF US DID.
COME ON, BUELLER, MOVE IT--!
MY SQUAD WAS *SYNTHESIZED* FOR THE ALIEN MISSION. WE WERE SOCIALIZED AND DOMESTICATED TO IMPROVE *COMPATIBILITY* WITH OUR HUMAN SHIPMATES.
WHAT WAS THE *GENESIS* OF MY LOVE? WAS IT THE LAST VESTIGE OF SOME PROGRAMMER'S SICK, COMIC-EROTIC *JOKE*?
BILLIE DIDN'T KNOW. *NEITHER* OF US KNEW.
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY EXPLAIN MY *PAIN* WHEN BILLIE FINALLY UNDERSTOOD THE *HORROR* OF OUR LIFE?


EVERYTHING I BELIEVED IN HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM ME. I WASN'T HUMAN. I WASN'T ANYTHING.
BILLIE WAS ALL I HAD LEFT--
--AND THEY WERE GOING TO TAKE HER FROM ME AS WELL.
LOADING BAY SEC CAM 3
MY CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE FLAME.
THERE'S A PURITY TO THE ALIEN I FIND REFRESHING. THERE'S NOTHING--UNCERTAIN--ABOUT ITS MOTIVES.
YOU'RE COMPLETELY MAD. YOUR MEN SHOULD HAVE KILLED YOU MONTHS AGO.
MY MEN BELIEVE IN ME--THEY TRUST ME.
SPICER, TAKE THE FLAMER.
DID YOU REALLY THINK YOUR PATHETIC TREASON WOULD SUCCEED?

LOAD THE REST OF THE CREATURES INTO THE SHIP'S HOLD AND PREPARE FOR LAUNCH. IT'S TIME.
I CAN FEEL THE ALIENS' IMPATIENCE. THEY'RE EAGER TO PROVE THEIR LOYALTY IN COMBAT.
THEY HAVE CONSUMED MAN'S IMPERFECTION, LEAVING THE EARTH CLEANSED--READY FOR A NEW MASTER.
MY TROOPS WILL RECLAIM EARTH FROM THEIR BRETHREN. TOGETHER WE WILL CREATE A NEW WORLD.
COMBAT?
WHO'S LEFT TO CONQUER, SPEARS? WHAT'S LEFT TO DESTROY?
I EXPECTED BETTER FROM YOU, WILKS--! I'M FIGHTING FOR MANKIND'S FUTURE--
THESE CREATURES ARE OUR SALVATION--!
I GET IT. YOU'RE FRIENDS NOW--
CHRIST, YOU ARE INSANE.
TAKE THE THREE OF THEM TO THE BREEDING CENTER--LEAVE THEM TO THE CREATURES STILL IN THE BASE.
IT'S THE LEAST WE CAN DO FOR OUR NEW ALLIES.
I'M COMING BACK FOR YOU, SPEARS--
THE MACARTHUR
583
BILLIE--


WILKS DISABLED THE MAIN COMMUNICATIONS ROOM DURING HIS ABORTED COUP--MOST OF THE CONTROL SYSTEMS WERE GONE. WITHOUT THEM I WAS HELPLESS.
THERE WAS A FUNCTIONAL AUXILIARY IN THE SOUTHERN QUADRANT OF THE BASE, BUT THERE WAS A PROBLEM.
--I HAD TO GET TO IT.
I FOUND THE ALIEN'S PROGRESSION PERVERSELY FASCINATING. MAN USES HIS MACHINES TO TERRAFORM HOSTILE WORLDS, TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT AMENABLE TO HUMAN LIFE.
THE ALIEN NEEDS NO MACHINES.
THE CREATURES IGNORED ME. PERHAPS I WASN'T VIEWED AS A THREAT. OR MAYBE I DIDN'T SHARE THE ORGANIC SCENT OF SPEARS' MEN--
WHERE'S SPEARS?!
MISERABLE BASTARD LEFT US TO DIE--!
--OR THEIR TERRIBLE, UNYIELDING FEAR.

AS I NEARED THE SECONDARY CONTROL ROOM, THE SOUNDS OF STRUGGLE FADED-- REPLACED BY THE LIQUID *HISS* OF ALIEN LIFE.
BODIES WERE EVERYWHERE, STARK REMNANTS OF THE ALIENS' REPRODUCTIVE FURY. FREED FROM THE CONFINES OF THE GENERAL'S BREEDING CHAMBER, THE PARASITES *MULTIPLIED* WITH REMARKABLE SPEED.
THIS WORLD *BELONGED* TO THEM.
SPEARS THOUGHT HE HAD TAUGHT THE ALIENS THE MEANING OF *FEAR*.
CONTROL ROOM
LEVEL 2
THEY HAD MERELY DISCOVERED THE *VIRTUE* OF *PATIENCE*.
SHE ALLOWED ME INTO HER NEST. A *COURTESY*, PERHAPS, OR MAYBE JUST *ACKNOWLEDGEMENT* OF HER POWER. I *WAS* NO THREAT TO HER. THERE WERE NO THREATS *LEFT* ON THIS BARREN WORLD.

MOVE IT.
SHIT, MAN--YOU CAN STILL HEAR THE SCREAMING--
TH-THIS IS FAR ENOUGH--JUST LEAVE 'EM--
YOU HEARD SPEARS--HE WANTS THEM INSIDE. IF WE--
SCREW SPEARS--I'M NOT GOING FACE TO FACE WITH THOSE THINGS TO ACCOMMODATE HIS SENSE OF--
--JESUS--HE'S GOING FOR MY--
BLAM!
AGHHH--
HOLD IT. RIGHT THERE.
TO HELL WITH ORDERS--SPEARS' MONSTERS WILL HAVE TO GO WITHOUT THEIR SUP--

THINK SMART, DAMMIT-- THOSE THINGS ARE EVERYWHERE. YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT OUT ALONE--
MAYBE, MAYBE NOT--
--BUT YOU WON'T BE HERE TO FIND OUT--
WHAT THE--
WHPH!
WARNING
STAND CLEAR OF PRESSURE SEAL
THAT'S IT--YOU'RE HISTORY!

OH GOD-- NO!
EMERGENCY PRESSURE SEAL
2
PRESSURE SEAL
2
--THAT'S ONE OF THE EMERGENCY PRESSURE SEALS-- INSURANCE AGAINST A HULL BREACH BEFORE THEY TERRAFORMED AN ATMOSPHERE ONTO THIS ROCK--
SEALS JUST DON'T DROP. SOME ONE MUST HAVE TRIGGERED IT.
HE'S A GOD-DAMN ANDROID--A MACHINE--FORGET HIM--THE CARGO SHIP IS OUR ONLY CHANCE.
MY GOD-- BUELLER.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND HIM--

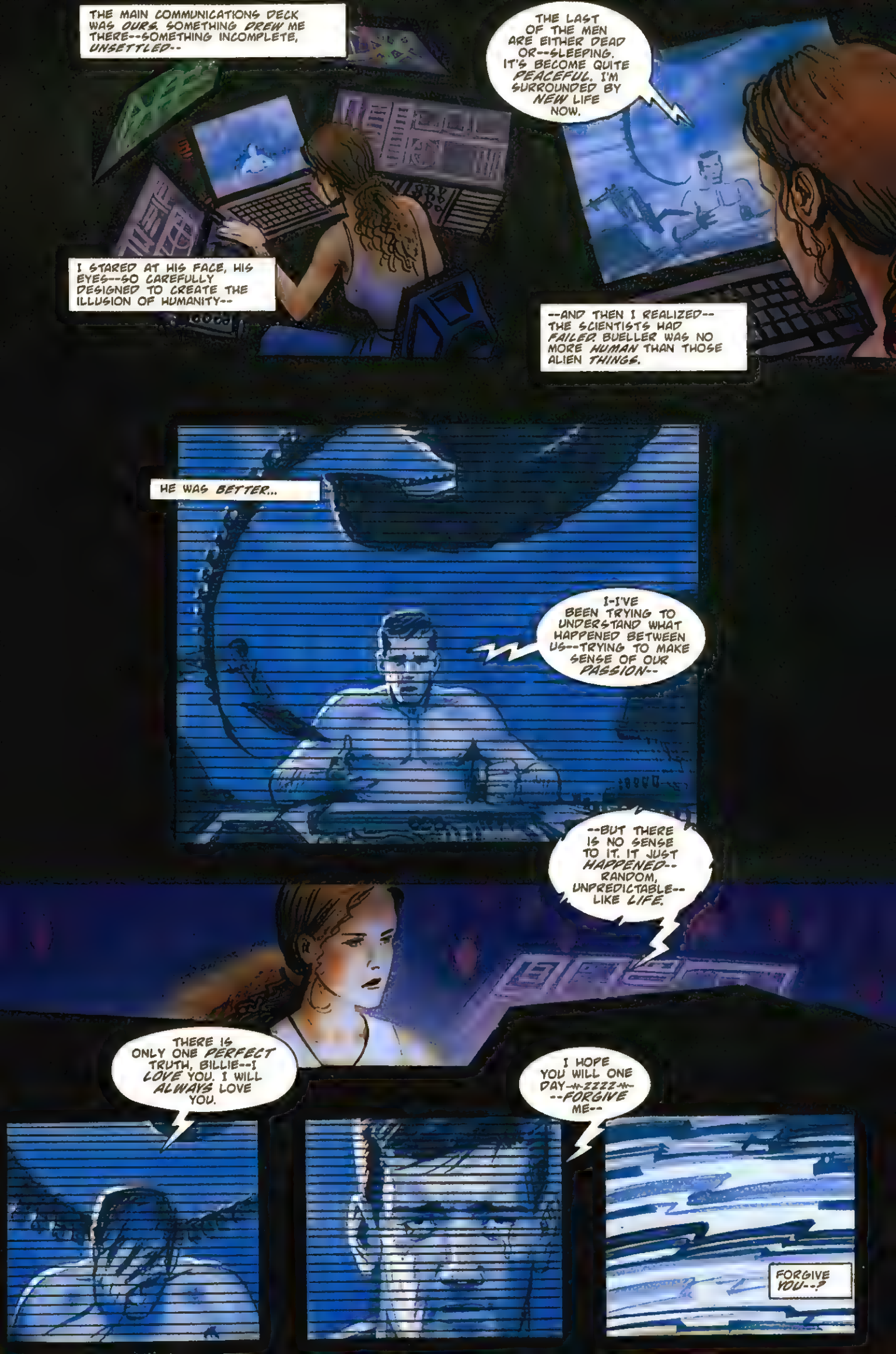
GOT IT-- LAUNCH SEQUENCE LOCKED AND READY.
SWITCH OVER TO COCKPIT CONTROL AND LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF--
THE MCARTHUR
BLAM BLAM
BRATT
GO, DAMMIT! MOVE!
WE'RE UNDER ATT-- AAAGHH!
BLOW THE LOCK AS SOON AS THE HATCH IS SECURED, THEN MEET ME AT THE COCKPIT.
IF SPEARS HAS SWITCHED PRIMARY CONTROL TO THE SHIP'S INTERNALS, WE JUST MIGHT BE ABLE TO--
WHAT IN HELL--? THOSE ARE THE ENGINES--

THAT FILTHY SON OF A BITCH--
HE'S LEAVING US BEHIND--
STAND CLEAR--THE ENGINES--
A CREW WOULD ONLY COMPLICATE MATTERS.
THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A LEADER IS FORCED TO MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS--DECISIONS FOR THE SAKE OF THE MISSION--
AAAAAAGGGHHHH!!!!!!

:UNGHH:-- SPEARS MUST HAVE BEEN PLANNING THIS ALL ALONG--
--HE NEVER INTENDED TO TAKE ANY OF HIS SOLDIERS BACK.
--JUST HIS PRECIOUS THINGS--
WILKS, I'M SCARED!
SO AM I, BILLIE. SO AM I...

SOMEONE'S ABOARD WITH US MORE TRAITORS. MORE SPIES.
TRYING TO INTERFERE WITH OUR MISSION--
--CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN--
THE NAVIGATIONAL COMPUTERS ARE CENTRALIZED IN THE COCKPIT--I'LL DEAL WITH SPEARS, THEN--
WHAT'S HE DOING--?
CONTROL CENTER
CAUTION
WHUMP!
NO! NO! NO!
MEN OF LIMITED VISION SOMETIMES HAVE DIFFICULTY SEEING THE TRUTH--
--I DON'T HAVE THE TIME OR PATIENCE TO EDUCATE THEM.

TIME PASSED SLOWLY IN THE DARKNESS.
I FELT SO LOST--SO ALONE.
WILKS SPENT THE FIRST DAYS SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO SEIZE CONTROL OF THE SHIP--BUT HIS KNOWLEDGE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY DIDN'T EXTEND TO COUNTERMANDING A NAVIGATIONAL MAINFRAME.
FOR A TIME WE WORRIED THAT SPEARS WOULD FIND A WAY TO BYPASS THE SHIP'S ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL--
BLAM
TIK
PORK-SODAEC
STEAK-BEEZROI
BLAM
BLAM
--BUT, SEQUESTERED IN HIS ALLOY COCCOON, SPEARS IGNORED US, LOST IN HIS VISIONS OF WAR AND GLORY. THE STIMULANTS HE RELIED ON FED HIS PARANOIA.
TIK
TIK
FINALLY, LOGIC EXHAUSTED, WILKS REVERTED TO RAW, FRUSTRATED INSTINCT.
THAT THE COCKPIT WAS DESIGNED TO WITHSTAND EXPLOSIVE DECOMPRESSION MEANT NOTHING TO HIM.
BLAM
DAMN YOU TO HELL!
WILKS' FURY NO LONGER HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH MUTINY. IT WAS ABOUT HATRED--VENGEANCE.


THE MAIN COMMUNICATIONS DECK WAS OURS. SOMETHING DREW ME THERE--SOMETHING INCOMPLETE, UNSETTLED--
THE LAST OF THE MEN ARE EITHER DEAD OR--SLEEPING. IT'S BECOME QUITE PEACEFUL. I'M SURROUNDED BY NEW LIFE NOW.
I STARED AT HIS FACE, HIS EYES--SO CAREFULLY DESIGNED TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF HUMANITY--
--AND THEN I REALIZED--THE SCIENTISTS HAD FAILED. BUELLER WAS NO MORE HUMAN THAN THOSE ALIEN THINGS.
HE WAS BETTER...
I-I'VE BEEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US--TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF OUR PASSION--
--BUT THERE IS NO SENSE TO IT. IT JUST HAPPENED--RANDOM, UNPREDICTABLE--LIKE LIFE.
THERE IS ONLY ONE PERFECT TRUTH, BILLIE--I LOVE YOU. I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU.
I HOPE YOU WILL ONE DAY--ZZZZ--FORGIVE ME--
FORGIVE YOU--?

HE PROTECTED ME, HELD ME, LOVED ME, AND I LEFT HIM TO THE ALIEN--HE WOULD BE ALONE, FOREVER.
THAT WAS MY "PERFECT TRUTH."
-ZZZZZ-THIS IS GATEWAY EARTH STATION--IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND STATE YOUR DESTINATION.
SON OF A--
PROJECTIONS SHOW YOU TARGETED FOR EARTH LANDING--DO NOT ATTEMPT THIS. REPEAT, DO NOT--
THIS IS SERGEANT WILKS ABOARD THE CARGO VESSEL McARTHUR--REQUEST STATUS ON PROJECTED LANDING COORDINATES--
THERE ARE NO LANDING COORDINATES. EARTH'S GONE--LOST TO THOSE THINGS.

COME ON, WE'RE LEAVING.
WHAT--? WHERE?
I'M TIRED OF PLAYING BY THE GENERAL'S RULES. IF I DECIDE TO COMMIT SUICIDE, IT'LL BE ON MY SCHEDULE-- NOT HIS.
2 EMERGENCY ESCAPE POD
THE POD'S DESIGNED FOR SHORT RANGE EMERGENCIES. MANEUVERABILITY IS THE SHITS--
BUT IT OUGHT TO BE ENOUGH TO GET US TO THE STATION.
CAUTION STAND CLEAR
ARE YOU SURE THE POD'S FUNCTIONAL? THE GENERAL--
CHANCES ARE SPEARS SABOTAGED IT ALONG WITH EVERYTHING ELSE--
--FUNNY THING IS, I JUST DON'T GIVE A DAMN ANYMORE.
I WATCHED THEM DISAPPEAR IN THE DARKNESS. I LET THEM GO--I WANTED THEM TO GO.

THE ALIEN IS THE ONLY ONE I CAN TRUST. THEIR LOYALTY TRANSCENDS HUMAN TREACHERY.
TOGETHER, WE WILL FORM A NEW WORLD. I WILL LEAD MAN AND ALIEN ALIKE TOWARD A NEW GLORY, A NEW BEGINNING--
--A BETTER TOMORROW!
SOME, OF COURSE, WILL PERISH IN THE TERRIBLE STRUGGLE AHEAD. I KNOW THAT. I RESPECT IT.
--BUT IN THE END, WE WILL PREVAIL.
I CAN HEAR THE ADULATION OF THE MASSES AS I RESCUE THEM FROM THEIR MISERY. I CAN HEAR THEIR CRIES OF JOY AS I INSPIRE THEM TO REBUILD OUR WORLD.
I COULD FEEL THEIR LOVE, THEIR ADMIRATION-- THEIR FEAR.
WE WERE ON THE CUSP OF A TRULY HISTORIC MOMENT--WHEN THE TIDE WOULD TURN AGAINST THE HUMAN DISORGANIZATION OF THE PAST--
MY BOYS WOULD MAKE US PROUD AGAIN.

SQUAD--COME TO ORDER!
THE TIME HAS COME TO PROVE YOURSELVES--TO SHOW YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER ALL YOU HAVE LEARNED.
WE MUST GIVE NO QUARTER. THE OTHERS ARE YOUR ENEMIES. THEY MUST BE DESTROYED!
ATTACK!
I GAVE YOU A DIRECT ORDER!

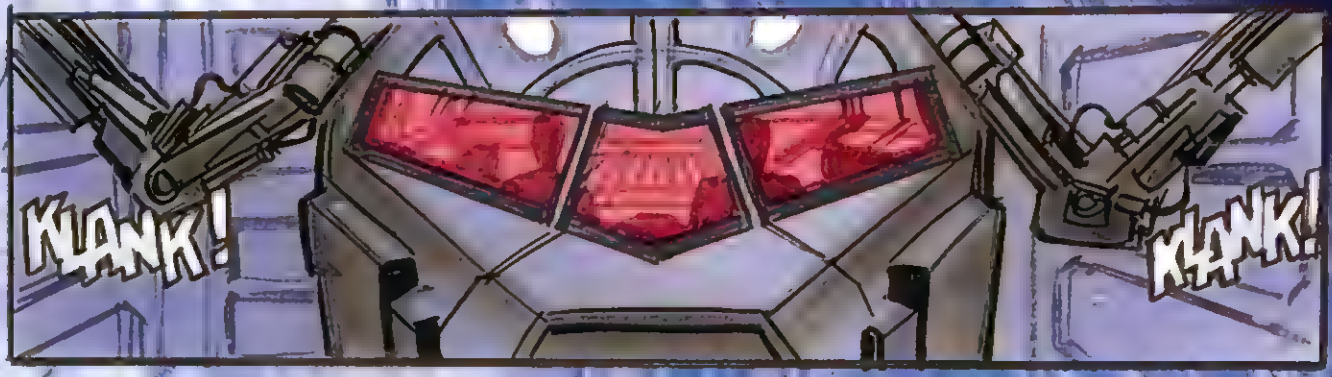
SWOOSH
SSSSSSSSSSSSSS
EEAAAAAGGGHHHHH!!!

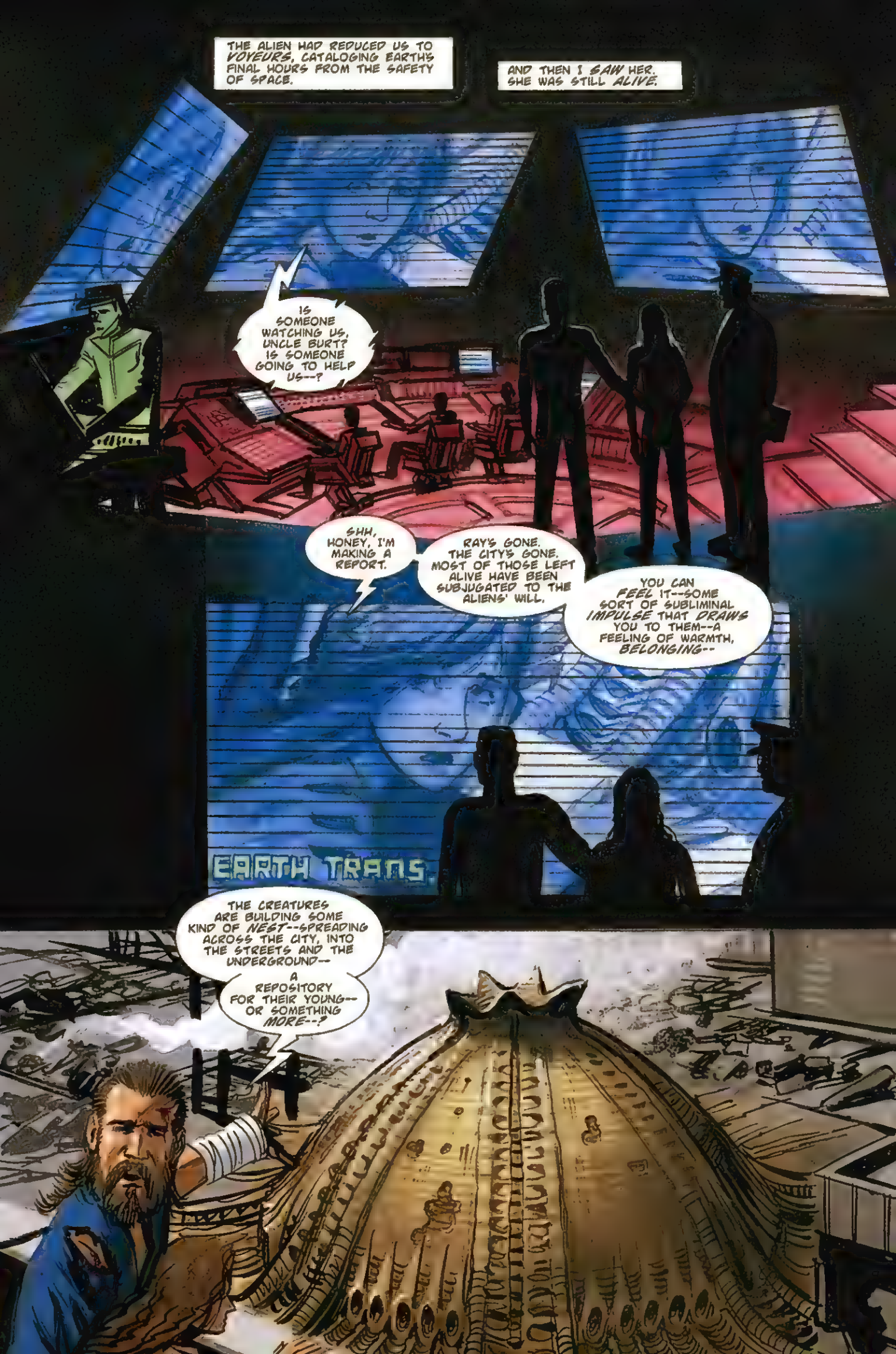
THE OLD GUARD MUST BE OVERTHROWN-- THEY MUST BE DEFEATED--!
I SEE NOW-- SHE'S TRYING TO TURN YOU AGAINST ME--
YOU FILTHY BITCH!
MY GOD. YOU USED ME--
YOU WANTED YOUR PRECIOUS CHILDREN BACK AND I--I BROUGHT THEM TO YOU--
SLUCG!!!

THEY TRACKED SPEARS' SHIP TO EARTH--AND THEN THERE WAS *NOTHING*. HIS REVOLUTION *ENDED* BEFORE IT HAD A CHANCE TO *BEGIN*.
THE ALIEN WOULDN'T *ALLOW* IT.

GATEWAY STATION WAS ALL HUMANITY HAD LEFT. CIVILIAN TECHNICIANS MONITORED THE LAST, SPORADIC SIGNALS FROM EARTH IN A TERRIBLE SORT OF *DEATHWATCH*.

THE PLATFORM HAD BECOME AN *OASIS* FOR THE FEW SURVIVORS CAPABLE OF FINDING TRANSPORT.




THE ALIEN HAD REDUCED US TO VOYEURS, CATALOGING EARTH'S FINAL HOURS FROM THE SAFETY OF SPACE.
AND THEN I SAW HER. SHE WAS STILL ALIVE.
IS SOMEONE WATCHING US, UNCLE BURT? IS SOMEONE GOING TO HELP US--?
SHH, HONEY, I'M MAKING A REPORT.
RAY'S GONE. THE CITY'S GONE. MOST OF THOSE LEFT ALIVE HAVE BEEN SUBJUGATED TO THE ALIENS' WILL.
YOU CAN FEEL IT--SOME SORT OF SUBLIMINAL IMPULSE THAT DRAWS YOU TO THEM--A FEELING OF WARMTH, BELONGING--
EARTH TRANS
THE CREATURES ARE BUILDING SOME KIND OF NEST--SPREADING ACROSS THE CITY, INTO THE STREETS AND THE UNDERGROUND--
A REPOSITORY FOR THEIR YOUNG--OR SOMETHING MORE--?

IT REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER TIME, YEARS AGO--
ANOTHER LITTLE GIRL LOST ON A WORLD SWARMING WITH THE ALIEN BASTARDS.
--RIPLEY?
I'M TIRED OF WATCHING.
IT'S TIME TO FINISH IT.

FEMALE WAR

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PLANET LV-426--ACHERON TERRA-FORMING COLONY.
WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I KNEW A LITTLE GIRL NAMED REBECCA.
SHE HAD A DOLL NAMED CASEY. THE TWO WOULD STARE FOR HOURS AS MANMADE STORMS BATTERED THEIR TINY SETTLEMENT.
THE ADULT COLONISTS FOUND THEIR NEW ENVIRONMENT CRUEL AND UNRELENTING, BUT THE LITTLE GIRL HAD KNOWN NOTHING ELSE. TO HER, THE PLANET WAS HOME.
SHE ONLY WANTED WHAT *ALL* CHILDREN WANT--
--THE WARMTH AND SECURITY OF FAMILY--
--THE HUMAN CONNECTEDNESS THAT COMES FROM *BELONGING*.

WHAT SHE GOT WAS A NIGHTMARE WITHOUT END.
NO--!

AS THE DEMONS RAGED, REBECCA SOUGHT SHELTER IN THE COLD STEEL MAZE BENEATH THE PLANET'S SURFACE.
SHE LISTENED FOR THE SCREAMS, AND WHEN THEY DIED...
SHE LISTENED FOR THEM.
SHE WASN'T MATURE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUE HORROR OF HER SITUATION. PERHAPS THAT WAS ALL THAT SAVED HER.
THEN ONE DAY, THERE WAS A NEW SOUND. RESCUE.
TO THE CHILD'S EYE, THE SOLDIERS WERE AS FRIGHTENING AS THE MONSTERS--
--WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A CORPORAL NAMED HICKS AND A CIVILIAN OBSERVER THEY CALLED RIPLEY.
HONEY--IT'S OKAY--!
SHE WASN'T LIKE THE OTHERS. SHE UNDERSTOOD.
OUT OF THE MARINES, ONLY HICKS SURVIVED --IF YOU COULD CALL WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM SURVIVAL.
THE ALIEN BLOOD COULD BURN THROUGH STEEL. IMAGINE WHAT IT COULD DO TO A MAN'S FACE...
THROUGH IT ALL, RIPLEY WAS THERE FOR THE LITTLE GIRL.
AND IN THE END, SHE PREVAILED.

I WATCHED YOU AS YOU FELL TO SLEEP--THEN I WENT TO FIND MY OWN PEACE. IT WAS OVER.
WE WERE GOING HOME.
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE IT HAD STARTED, I COULD DREAM OF LIFE--BEGINNINGS.
THAT WAS ALL THEY WERE. DREAMS."
SHE'S COMING OUT OF IT.
NGGHHH --HOW LONG--
ABOUT THREE DAYS. YOU'LL START FEELING BETTER ONCE--
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN, "THREE DAYS"? TRAVEL TIME TO EARTH IS WEEKS--
STILL IS.
YOUR MISSION'S NOT OVER YET.
YOU BASTARDS--
--YOU MISERABLE BASTARDS.

...THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED ONE SHIP JUST WASN'T ENOUGH--
--SENT YOU TO MAKE SURE THE JOB GOT DONE.
WHY THE HELL ARE YOU HERE, CAPTAIN HANKERSON?
WE'VE BEEN ANALYZING THE SULACO'S TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE TIME YOU ENTERED PLANETARY ORBIT. YOU'RE GETTING TO BE AN EXPERT ON LV-426.
YEAH, THROUGH ATTRITION.
NOT THAT IT MATTERS. THE TERRA-FORMING REACTOR WENT CRITICAL AND DUSTED THE PLACE JUST AFTER--
HARDLY. THE FACILITY'S HISTORY...
...BUT THAT'S A CORPORATE INSURANCE PROBLEM.
WE'RE INTERESTED IN SOMETHING ELSE.

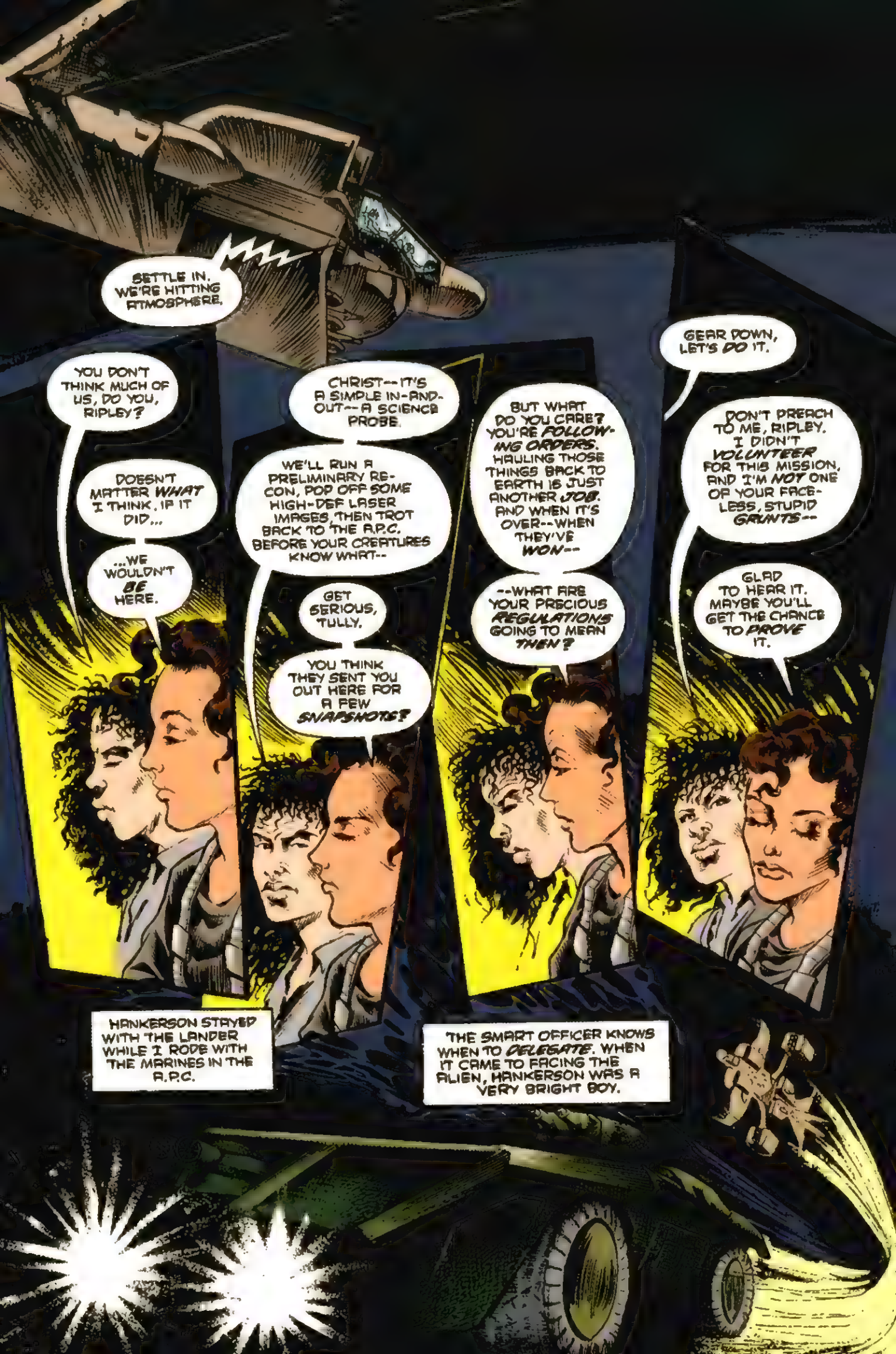
DALLAS.
PARKER.
KANE.
NAMES MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?
YOU KNOW THEY DO.
THEY WERE THE CREW OF MY FIRST SHIP--THE NOSTROMO.
WE-WE'D PICKED UP WHAT WE THOUGHT WAS A DISTRESS SIGNAL FROM LV-426. AFTER LANDING, DALLAS, KANE, AND LAMBERT WENT OUT TO INVESTIGATE. AND IT STARTED...
PER THE CORPORATION, ALL TAPES WERE LOST AFTER YOU SELF-DESTRUCTED THE NOSTROMO.
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.
CLICK
WHAT TH--? THAT'S FROM KANE'S HELMET CAMERA-- WHEN WE DID OUR PRELIMINARY RECON OF THE DERELICT SHIP...
ALL THE CORPORATE BULL-SHIT ABOUT NO PROOF --CHRIST-- EARTH'S KNOWN THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CREATURES FROM THE START...
DOES THAT SURPRISE YOU?
NO. I SUPPOSE IT DOESN'T.

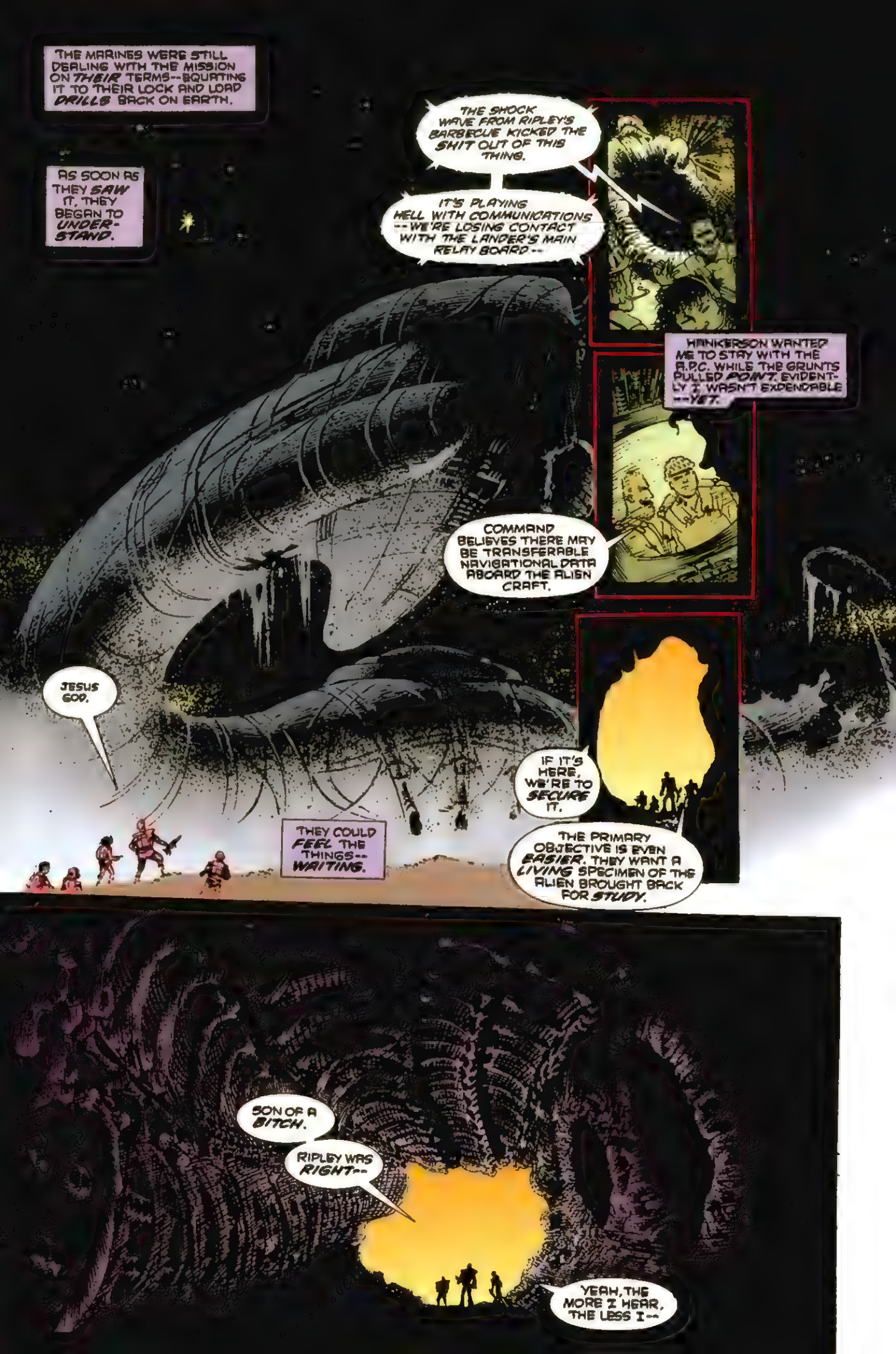
THE INBOARD SUIT RECORDERS LOGGED EVERYTHING. THE NOSTROMO'S ANDROID DUMPED THE DATA INTO THE ESCAPE POD'S COMPUTER LONG BEFORE YOU SLAGGED HIM AND BLEW THE MAIN SHIP.
WE ASSUME THIS... CREATURE... WAS INCUBATING THE ALIEN SPORE WHEN IT DIED.
COMMAND BELIEVES IT WAS SOME SORT OF NAVIGATOR OR PILOT--
BUT IT'S JUST DEAD-- LIKE DALLAS, KANE AND THE REST OF THEM.
DID YOU WAKE ME UP FOR MY ADVICE? IT'S REAL SIMPLE.
IF ACHERON'S STILL INTACT-- IF ANY OF THOSE THINGS ARE STILL ALIVE...
...DROP A NUKE AND WASTE THEM.
SEE, I KNOW HOW THIS ENDS--
--THEY ALL DIE.

THE MONSTERS -- THEY'RE JUST ANIMALS. BUT THIS CREATURE REPRESENTS SENTIENT LIFE, CAPABLE OF NAVIGATION, CONSTRUCTION--
I MANAGED TO PULL A PARTIAL TRANSLATION OF THAT ALIEN SIGNAL BEFORE EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL. IT WAS NO DISTRESS SIGNAL. IT WAS A WARNING.
I'M GOING TO MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU. THIS IS A SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION --THAT'S ALL. AND I NEED A GUIDE.
THOSE ANIMALS PUT YOUR "SENTIENT LIFE" OUT OF BUSINESS, CAPTAIN --THE SAME WAY THEY DESTROYED THE NOSTROMO, YOUR MARINES, AND THE COLONISTS ON ACHERON!
SURE. AND WHAT'S THE BRIBE THIS TIME, CAPTAIN? REINSTATEMENT? BACK PAY?
I'M NEVER GOING BACK--
--DISCUSSION OVER.
YOU'RE ACTING LIKE YOU HAVE A CHOICE--
JESUS -- YOU THINK YOU CAN THREATEN ME? AFTER EVERYTHING I'VE BEEN THROUGH--?
THREATEN?
NO.
BUT I'M GOING TO HAVE RELIABLE, FIRST-PERSON INFORMATION ON THIS MISSION.

I'D SEEN HANKERSON'S KIND BEFORE--FULL OF THE MINDLESS BRAVADO THAT COMES FROM *IGNORANCE*.
THE MARINES SET THE SULACO'S AUTOMATIC GUIDANCE SYSTEMS FOR EARTH AND GAVE ME AN HOUR TO PREPARE FOR THEIR DAMNED MISSION.
I SPENT THOSE LAST MINUTES WITH YOU.
DON'T YOU SEE, NEWT? I WOULD HAVE DONE *ANYTHING* TO PROTECT YOU...
PLAY ALONG WITH HANKERSON'S 'EXPEDITION' --RETURN TO FACE THOSE *THINGS*--
TIME'S UP --LET'S GO.
--EVEN ...*LEAVE* YOU.

HANKERSON'S MARINES WERE SO MUCH *LIKE* THE OTHERS. I DIDN'T WANT TO GET CLOSE TO THEM. I *KNEW* THEY WERE GOING TO DIE."
UHH, EXCUSE ME, MISS--YOU SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THAT?
REGULATION DUCHAMP BLASTER--500 ROUND MAG WITH TWO IN-BOARD CLIPS, MEDIUM RECOIL, PISS POOR AT A DISTANCE BUT A REAL *MOTHER* UP CLOSE.
I THINK I CAN MANAGE.
I KNEW WHAT THEY WERE THINKING: THE MARINES ON THE SULACO DIED BECAUSE THEY *MESSED* UP--BUT THEIR TEAM WAS *BETTER* THAN THAT--*TOUGHER, MEANER.*
I WANT EVERYONE DOWN AND BUCKLED--SEPARATION IN TWO MINUTES.
THE FIRST SQUAD FELT THE SAME WAY ABOUT THE CREW OF THE *NOSTROMO.*
OUR ALMIGHTY TECHNOLOGY LULLED US INTO BELIEVING WE WERE SOMEHOW *SUPERIOR* TO THE ALIEN...
LIKE GUNS AND MACHINES MEAN A *DAMN* TO THE MONSTERS. LIKE *ANYTHING* DOES.

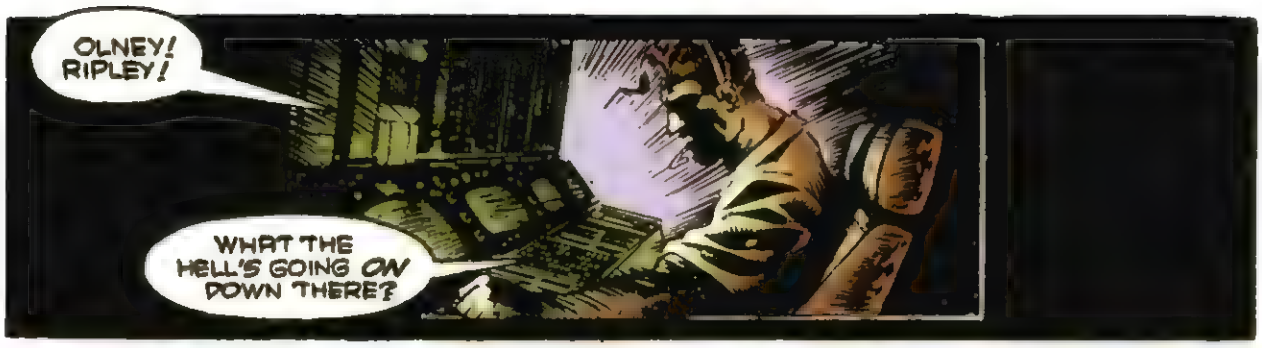

SETTLE IN. WE'RE HITTING ATMOSPHERE.
YOU DON'T THINK MUCH OF US, DO YOU, RIPLEY?
DOESN'T MATTER WHAT I THINK, IF IT DID...
...WE WOULDN'T BE HERE.
CHRIST--IT'S A SIMPLE IN-AND-OUT--A SCIENCE PROBE.
WE'LL RUN A PRELIMINARY RE-CON, POP OFF SOME HIGH-DEF LASER IMAGES, THEN TROT BACK TO THE A.P.C. BEFORE YOUR CREATURES KNOW WHAT--
GET SERIOUS, TULLY.
YOU THINK THEY SENT YOU OUT HERE FOR A FEW SNAPSHOTS?
BUT WHAT DO YOU CARE? YOU'RE FOLLOW-ING ORDERS. HAULING THOSE THINGS BACK TO EARTH IS JUST ANOTHER JOB. AND WHEN IT'S OVER--WHEN THEY'VE WON--
--WHAT ARE YOUR PRECIOUS REGULATIONS GOING TO MEAN THEN?
GEAR DOWN, LET'S DO IT.
DON'T PREACH TO ME, RIPLEY. I DIDN'T VOLUNTEER FOR THIS MISSION, AND I'M NOT ONE OF YOUR FACE-LESS, STUPID GRUNTS--
GLAD TO HEAR IT. MAYBE YOU'LL GET THE CHANCE TO PROVE IT.
HANKERSON STAYED WITH THE LANDER WHILE I RODE WITH THE MARINES IN THE A.P.C.
THE SMART OFFICER KNOWS WHEN TO DELEGATE. WHEN IT CAME TO FACING THE ALIEN, HANKERSON WAS A VERY BRIGHT BOY.

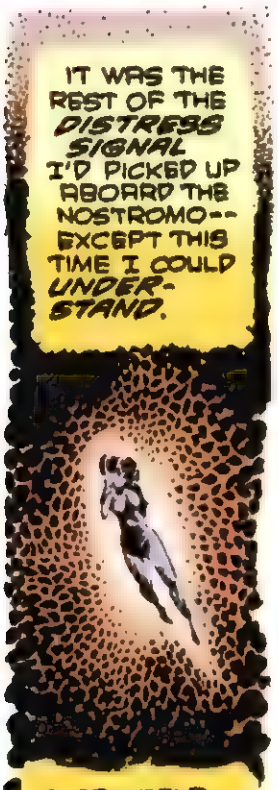

THE MARINES WERE STILL DEALING WITH THE MISSION ON THEIR TERMS--EQUATING IT TO THEIR LOCK AND LOAD DRILLS BACK ON EARTH.
AS SOON AS THEY SAW IT, THEY BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND.
THE SHOCK WAVE FROM RIPLEY'S BARBECUE KICKED THE SHIT OUT OF THIS THING.
IT'S PLAYING HELL WITH COMMUNICATIONS --WE'RE LOSING CONTACT WITH THE LANDER'S MAIN RELAY BOARD--
HINKERSON WANTED ME TO STAY WITH THE R.P.C. WHILE THE GRUNTS PULLED POINT. EVIDENTLY I WASN'T EXPENDABLE --YET.
COMMAND BELIEVES THERE MAY BE TRANSFERABLE NAVIGATIONAL DATA ABOARD THE ALIEN CRAFT.
JESUS GOD.
IF IT'S HERE, WE'RE TO SECURE IT.
THEY COULD FEEL THE THINGS--WAITING.
THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS EVEN EASIER. THEY WANT A LIVING SPECIMEN OF THE ALIEN BROUGHT BACK FOR STUDY.
SON OF A BITCH.
RIPLEY WAS RIGHT--
YEAH, THE MORE I HEAR, THE LESS I--

--LIKE IT.
OH JESUS.
MOVEMENT, FIFTY YARDS.
RIPLEY-- TALK TO ME, DAMN IT--!
SOME OF THEM MUST HAVE SURVIVED THE EXPLOSION AND RETURNED TO THE DERELICT--
DON'T PUSH IT, SERGEANT--YOU'RE SAFER OUTSIDE, ON OPEN GROUND--
;KRRKZZZ;-- THIS IS HANKERSON. YOU WILL NOT EVACUATE UNTIL I GIVE--;KRRZZZ;
RIPLEY IS ;KRRKZZZ; --TACTICAL ADVICE--I AM IN COMMAND OF THIS--

WE'RE LOSING THE LANDER'S SIGNAL, BUT I THINK YOU GET THE DRIFT. LET'S MAKE THIS QUICK AND PAINLESS.
FORTY YARDS, CLOSING.
DAMN IT, SERGEANT, THEY KNOW YOU'RE THERE!
YOU'VE GOT TO GET AWAY FROM--
AGHH--!
UMMPH!
CRUNCH
CRUMPH

MASTERS--
ARE YOU--?
CAN'T --CAN'T MOVE MY LEGS-- CAN'T--
IT STARTED SLOWLY-- AN ELECTRO-MAGNETIC SYNTHESIS I CAN'T PRETEND TO UNDERSTAND.
OH GOD--
THE MARINE MUST HAVE TRIGGERED SOME SORT OF POWER SOURCE INSIDE THE ALIEN VESSEL.
IT WAS MORE THAN SIMPLE ENERGY-- IT WAS AN INTUITIVE, LIVING FORCE --IT TOOK CONTROL OF THE A.P.C.'S SYSTEMS, RE-PROGRAMMING THE TRACTOR'S 'SMART' COMPUT-ERS TO UNDER-STAND A NEW LANGUAGE.
IT FOLLOWED HIS LIFE-SUPPORT SIGNAL LIKE AN ELECTRONIC SNAKE, ENTERING THE A.P.C.'S COMMUNICA-TIONS DECK.
WHAT IN--?
THE READ-OUTS FLICKERED WITH A LITANY OF INDECIPHERABLE INFORMATION-- ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THE DEAD PILOT'S MIND.
OUR MACHINES USE SCREENS AND VISUAL READ-OUTS TO DELIVER DATA. THE DERELICT'S COMPUTERS WENT STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE.
IT SPOKE TO ME.





I SAW TELE-METRY INFOR-MATION, STAR CHARTS, TAN-GENTIAL REFERENCE POINTS.

--I FELT HER STRENGTH, HER UTTER SUPREMACY.

WE ASSUMED THE ALIEN INFESTATIONS WERE SPORADIC, ARBITRARY-- THAT THEY BRED WHEREVER CONVENIENT, LIKE SOME HORRIBLE CANCERS.

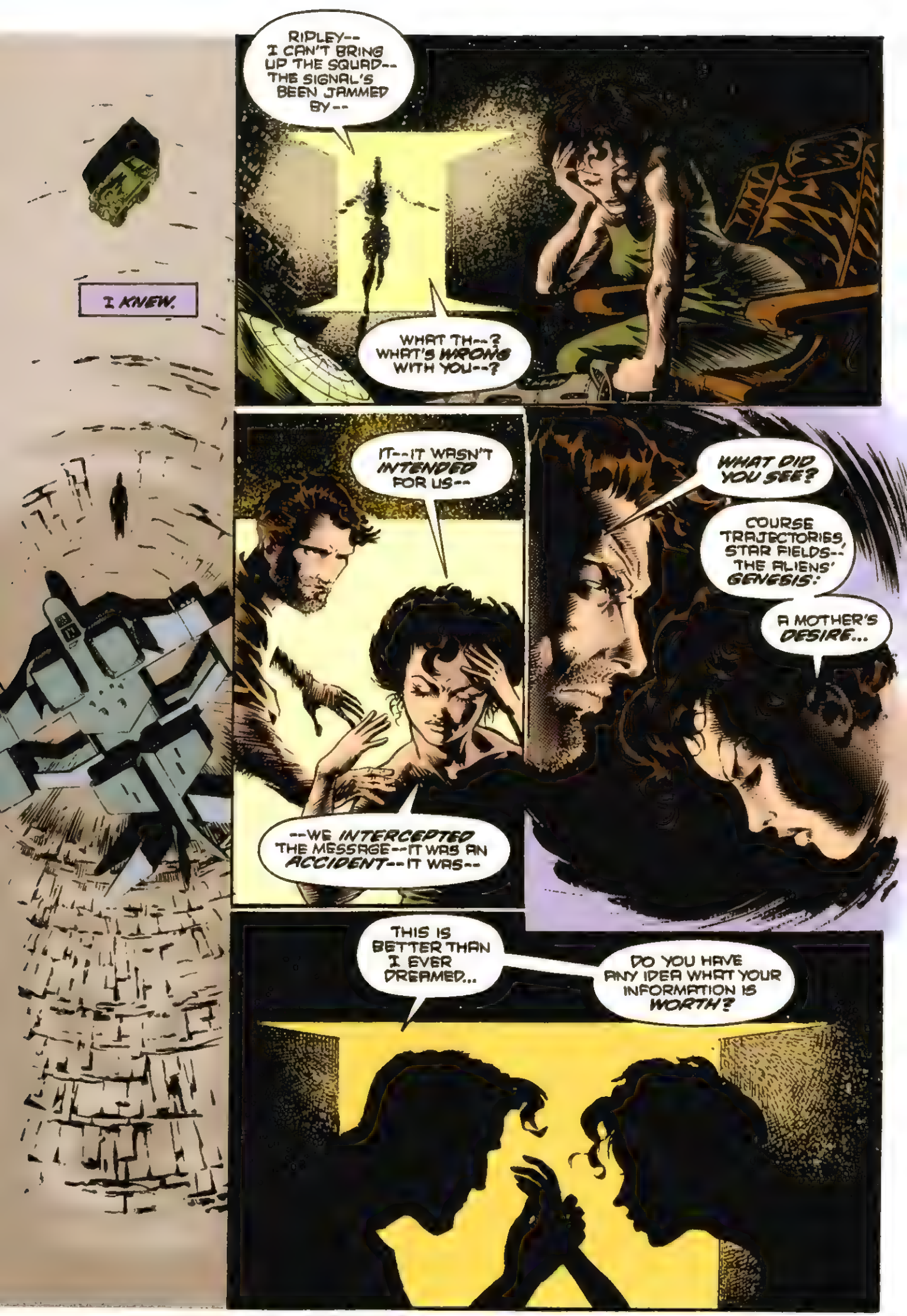
WE WERE WRONG. THEY MOVE WITH PURPOSE.

THE PILOT OF THE DERELICT SHIP HAD DISCOVERED THE ALIENS' GENESIS-- THE SOURCE OF THEIR POWER.

SHE'S CALLING HER CHILDREN BACK TO HER."

TEN YARDS...
DAMN IT, SERGEANT, THEY'RE ALMOST ON TOP OF US--!
MASTERS --GIVE ME YOUR HAND --I'LL PULL YOU--
UCCKK--!

CONCENTRATE YOUR FIRE, DAMN IT! THE HULL'S ALREADY--
GET DOWN!
SUDDENLY IT STOPPED. I FELT THE ALIEN IMAGES DRIFTING AWAY, LEAVING ONLY A PIERCING, HOLLOW ROAR--
UGGHH--
NOOOO--!
--THE RESIDUAL HUM OF THE DEAD ONE'S LAST WARNING.
SON OF A BITCH--
--THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!

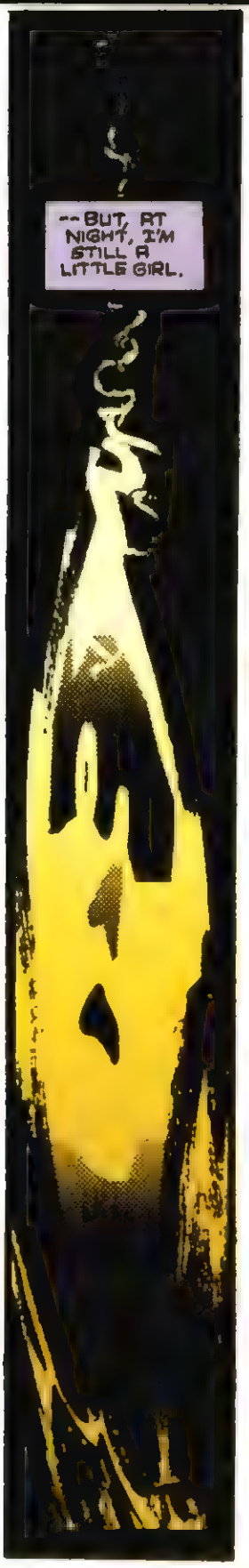

I KNEW.
RIPLEY-- I CAN'T BRING UP THE SQUAD-- THE SIGNAL'S BEEN JAMMED BY--
WHAT TH--? WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU--?
IT--IT WASN'T INTENDED FOR US--
--WE INTERCEPTED THE MESSAGE--IT WAS AN ACCIDENT--IT WAS--
WHAT DID YOU SEE?
COURSE TRAJECTORIES, STAR FIELDS-- THE ALIENS' GENESIS:
A MOTHER'S DESIRE...
THIS IS BETTER THAN I EVER DREAMED...
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOUR INFORMATION IS WORTH?

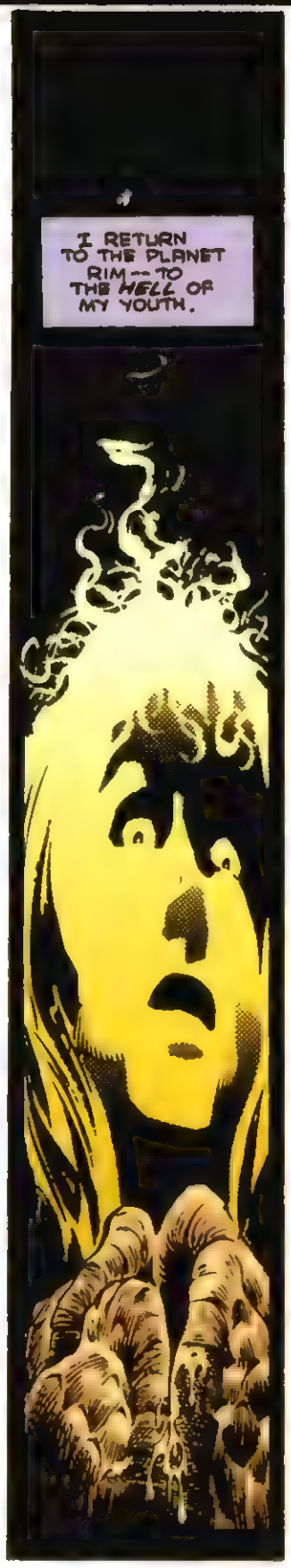
ONCE WE GET BACK TO THE HARRISON, WE'LL TRANSMIT THE COORDINATES BACK TO EARTH, THEY'LL HAVE A SHIP ARMED AND READY WITHIN HOURS--
WAIT-- WHAT ABOUT THE SQUAD--?
THEY WERE DEAD BEFORE WE TOUCHED GROUND.
THE CORPORATION'S GENETICS TEAM THOUGHT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE THEM TO BREED SPECIMENS --BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER ANY--
ZUKKE!
MATTERS TO ME, YOU LITTLE SHIT.
THE OTHERS ARE DEAD. JOIN THE CLUB.
THE CORPORATION WAS FILLED WITH MEN LIKE HANKERSON. IF THEY FOUND A WAY TO CONTROL THE ALIEN, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY UNLEASHED THE THINGS ON EARTH.
PUNCH UP THE HARRISON'S COORDINATES-- THEN LOCK ON TO THE A.P.C.'S FUEL SYSTEM.
LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

I HAD SEEN WHAT THE CORPORATION WOULD DO TO RETRIEVE ONE OF THE CREATURES. IMAGINE WHAT THEY WOULD DO TO TRACK AN ENTIRE PLANET.
WE DETONATED THE A.P.C. FROM ORBIT, TERMINATING THE LAST OF THE CORPORATION'S 'SPECIMENS.'
IT WOULD TAKE WEEKS FOR A SECOND MILITARY VESSEL TO REACH ACHERON--BUT IT WOULD COME.
SOONER OR LATER THEY WOULD PIECE TOGETHER WHAT HAPPENED. SOONER OR LATER THEY'D COME FOR ME.

EVERYTHING WAS SO COMPLICATED. I KEPT THINKING OF YOU, NEWT-- BUT I COULDN'T FORGET HANKERSON'S MISSION--
--OR THE IDEA OF THOSE ALIEN THINGS ON EARTH.
THE THREE OF US DISAPPEARED, LOSING OURSELVES IN ONE OF THE OUTER COLONIES. I PRAYED THE CORPORATION WOULD NEVER FIND THEIR PRECIOUS SPECIMEN--
--BUT OF COURSE THEY DID.
SO MUCH FOR PRAYERS.
SO YOU'VE COME BACK TO SAVE US.
AND HOW THE HELL ARE YOU GOING TO DO THAT?
BY GOING TO RIPLEY'S GENESIS WORLD AND USING THE ALIEN THE WAY IT'S BEEN USING US--
--THEN BLOWING THE UGLY BASTARDS STRAIGHT TO HELL.

AT NIGHT, I JUST WANT TO SLEEP, TO *FORGET*--

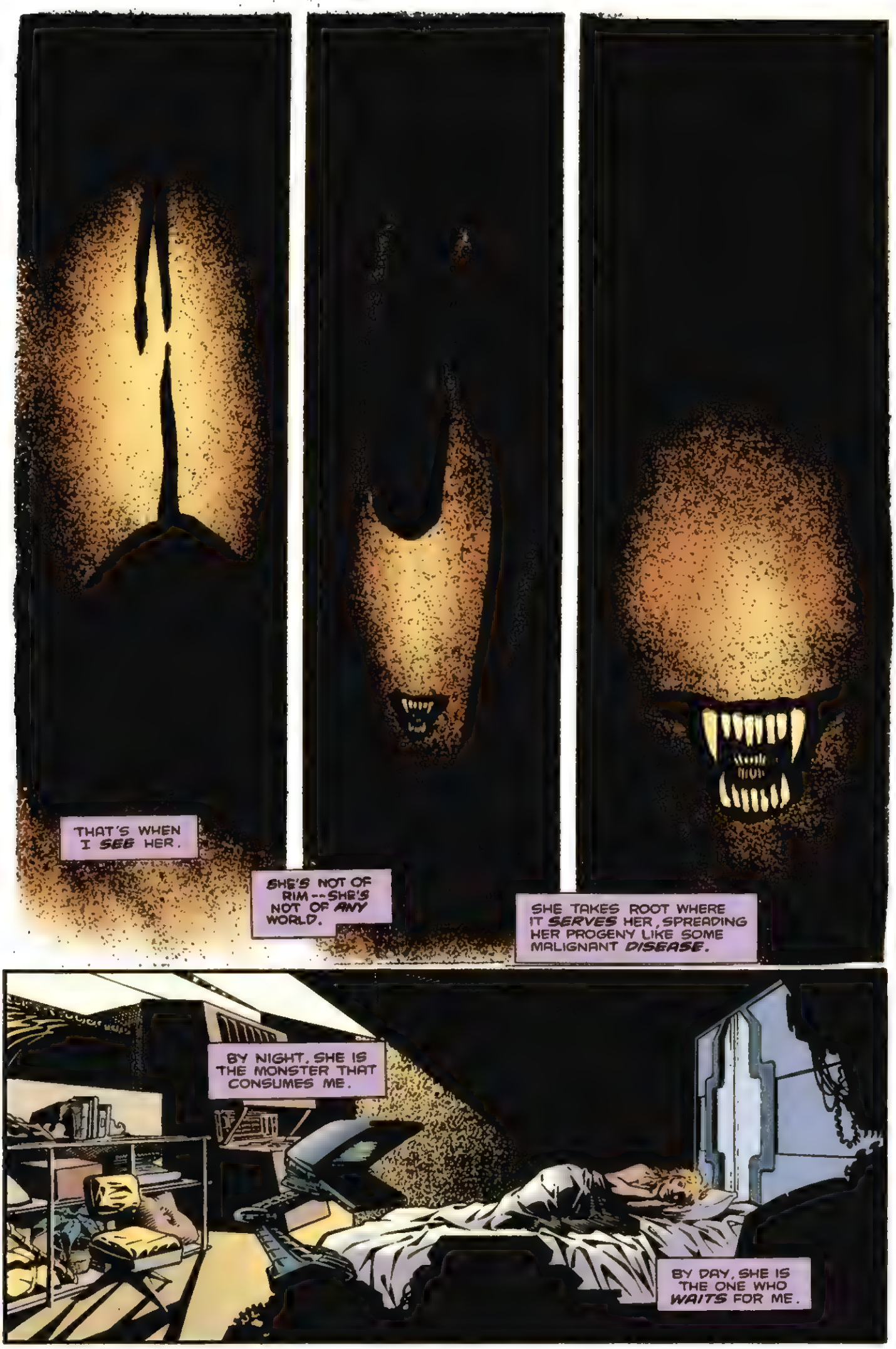

--BUT, AT NIGHT, I'M STILL A LITTLE GIRL.


I RETURN TO THE PLANET RIM -- TO THE *HELL* OF MY YOUTH.

THE ALIEN TOOK ME AND PULLED ME INTO ITS NEST.

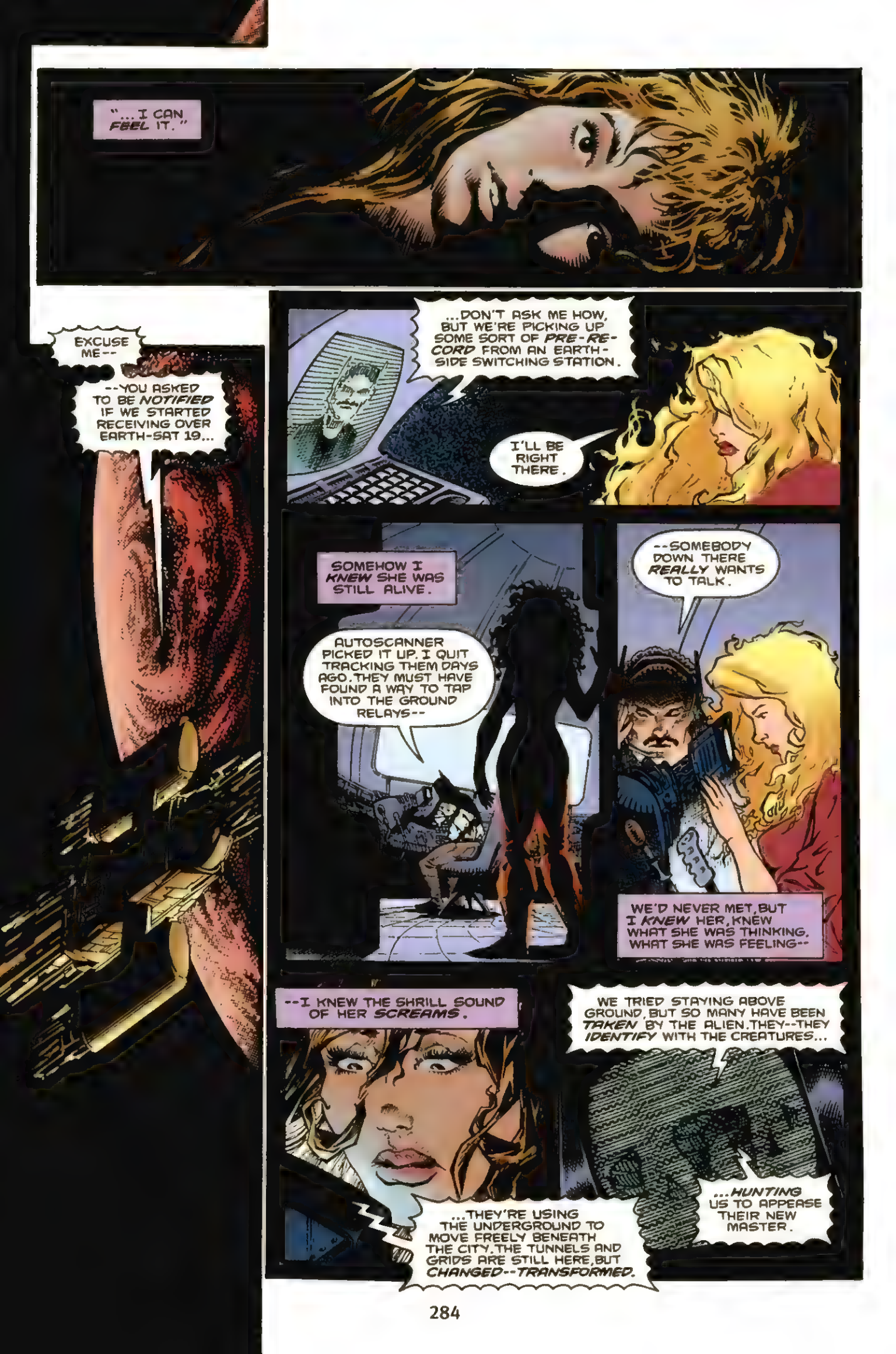
A,EEEE--!

IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME.
THE ALIEN HONORS ME WITH ITS SEED--
--WITH ITS DARKNESS--
--AND SUDDENLY, I AM PART OF SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT AND POWERFUL, SOMETHING THAT TRANSCENDS HUMAN WEAKNESS.


THAT'S WHEN I SEE HER.
SHE'S NOT OF RIM -- SHE'S NOT OF ANY WORLD.
SHE TAKES ROOT WHERE IT SERVES HER, SPREADING HER PROGENY LIKE SOME MALIGNANT DISEASE.
BY NIGHT, SHE IS THE MONSTER THAT CONSUMES ME.
BY DAY, SHE IS THE ONE WHO WAITS FOR ME.

" DADDY? ARE WE GOING TO DIE?"
JLA SATELLITE LINK
C'MON, DAMN IT--
"WE--WE ALL DIE SOMEDAY, HONEY. IT'S THE WAY OF THINGS."
" BUT IT'S DIFFERENT NOW, ISN'T IT?"
"IT'S ALL DIFFERENT, AMY. I WISH YOU COULD HAVE SEEN IT BEFORE, WHEN YOUR MOTHER...
"...WHEN SHE WAS STILL--"
"I STILL SEE MOMMY WHEN I SLEEP. SHE TELLS ME TO BE A GOOD GIRL. SHE TELLS ME SHE LOVES ME."
I DON'T BELIEVE THIS--MIDSUMMER AND IT'S 30 DEGREES...
...WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?
DON'T KNOW WHY WE BOTHER.
THERE'S NOBODY LEFT. NOBODY TO SEE.
ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THOSE THINGS KILL US...
...OR BREED US, LIKE THOSE OTHER POOR BASTARDS.
I'LL BREED MY GODDAMN BRAINS INTO A WALL BEFORE I LET THEM TOUCH ME.
SOMETIMES I THINK I'VE BEEN BAD, AND THAT'S WHY THE MONSTERS CAME--
--THAT'S WHY THEY TOOK MOMMY FROM US.
AMY, NO...
BEN, GIVE ME A HAND--!

GREAT WORLD, ISN'T IT? THE AUTOMATICS WILL PROBABLY HUM RIGHT INTO THE NEXT CENTURY--
--TOO BAD NONE OF US WILL BE AROUND TO ENJOY IT.
DAMMIT, PAUL--NOT NOW.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "NOT NOW"? YOU THINK IF WE IGNORE THEM, THEY'LL JUST GO AWAY--?
LOOK AROUND YOU, MAN--THIS ISN'T EARTH ANYMORE. IT'S A NEW WORLD.
THEIR WORLD.
THAT'S ENOUGH!
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY? YOU'RE RIGHT? IT'S OVER?
HERE--LOOK AT IT: THREE SHOTS LEFT.
I KNOW WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST. I KNOW OUR CHANCES.
WHY DON'T YOU USE IT? IF THERE'S A HELL, IT CAN'T BE ANY WORSE THAN THIS.
I--I CAN'T...
...THERE'S A REASON WHY WE'RE HERE--A REASON THOSE THINGS HAVEN'T TAKEN US...
...SOMEONE'S OUT THERE...


"...I CAN FEEL IT."
EXCUSE ME--
--YOU ASKED TO BE NOTIFIED IF WE STARTED RECEIVING OVER EARTH-SAT 19...
...DON'T ASK ME HOW, BUT WE'RE PICKING UP SOME SORT OF PRE-RECORD FROM AN EARTH-SIDE SWITCHING STATION.
I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.
SOMEHOW I KNEW SHE WAS STILL ALIVE.
AUTOSCANNER PICKED IT UP. I QUIT TRACKING THEM DAYS AGO. THEY MUST HAVE FOUND A WAY TO TAP INTO THE GROUND RELAYS--
--SOMEBODY DOWN THERE REALLY WANTS TO TALK.
WE'D NEVER MET, BUT I KNEW HER, KNEW WHAT SHE WAS THINKING, WHAT SHE WAS FEELING--
--I KNEW THE SHRILL SOUND OF HER SCREAMS.
WE TRIED STAYING ABOVE GROUND, BUT SO MANY HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY THE ALIEN. THEY--THEY IDENTIFY WITH THE CREATURES...
...THEY'RE USING THE UNDERGROUND TO MOVE FREELY BENEATH THE CITY. THE TUNNELS AND GRIDS ARE STILL HERE, BUT CHANGED--TRANSFORMED.
...HUNTING US TO APPEASE THEIR NEW MASTER.

MUCH OF WHAT OCCURRED ON RIM HAS BECOME A *BLUR*-- TIME'S SOFTENED THE MEMORY INTO A SWIRL OF *BLOOD* AND *SHADOW*.

IT--IT'S DIFFICULT TO BE SURE, BUT THE TUNNELS APPEAR TO CONVERGE INTO A CENTRAL *LOCUS*-- LIKE *SPOKES* ON A WHEEL.

THE INNOCENCE OF YOUTH IS BOTH A *STRENGTH* AND A *WEAKNESS*.

WE'RE COMING CLOSER TO THE HUB. THERE ARE MORE BODIES NOW, FUSED INTO THE WALLS LIKE MAD *SCULPTURE*.

THERE IS TIME TO *HEAL*-- BUT YOU HAVE THE SAME LONG YEARS TO *REMEMBER*. TO *DREAM*.

I USED TO WONDER WHY THEY RECLAIMED THEMSELVES--FILLED THEIR WORLD WITH THE DECAY OF DEATH. THEN I REALIZED--

--THEY'RE *IMMERSED* IN DEATH. THEY *SURROUND* THEMSELVES WITH IT.

PERHAPS THAT TERRIBLE, SHEER *FINALITY* IS THE ONLY THING THEY TRULY UNDERSTAND.

JESUS, PAUL--DO YOU *HEAR* THAT?

" WE--WE HEARD STORIES FROM OTHER CITIES ABOUT THE ALIEN BREEDERS. DOZENS WERE FOUND AND DESTROYED, BACK WHEN WE STILL HAD HOPE.
" BUT THEY SAID THE CREATURES BRED IN ISOLATION, TO PROTECT THE NASCENT EGGS.
" THIS ONE'S EXPOSED, IN THE OPEN, AS IF--
"--AS IF SHE'S WAITING FOR SOMETHING."

LET'S MOVE BACK INTO THE TUNNELS. I DON'T LIKE THE--
NOOOO--!
DADDY--!
SHE--SHE WANTS TO--SHE WANTS TO TOUCH YOU--ahh--ahh--YYYEEEARGHH!
GET HIM OFF ME--!
ahhhhhh--L-LOOK AT IT--LOOK WHAT IT'S BECOME--
--SO BEAUTIFUL--SO--AHH--AHHGGG--!
OH GOD--HELP ME! HELP--

PLOOM!
PLOOM!
THREE SHOTS-- D-DADDY SAID THREE SHOTS.
GO AWAY--!
PLOOM!
JUST LEAVE US ALONE--!
"KAK--" "KAK--" THEY HAD TO HAVE HEARD THE SHOTS-- LET'S GO.
GOD, NO.
NOT AGAIN.

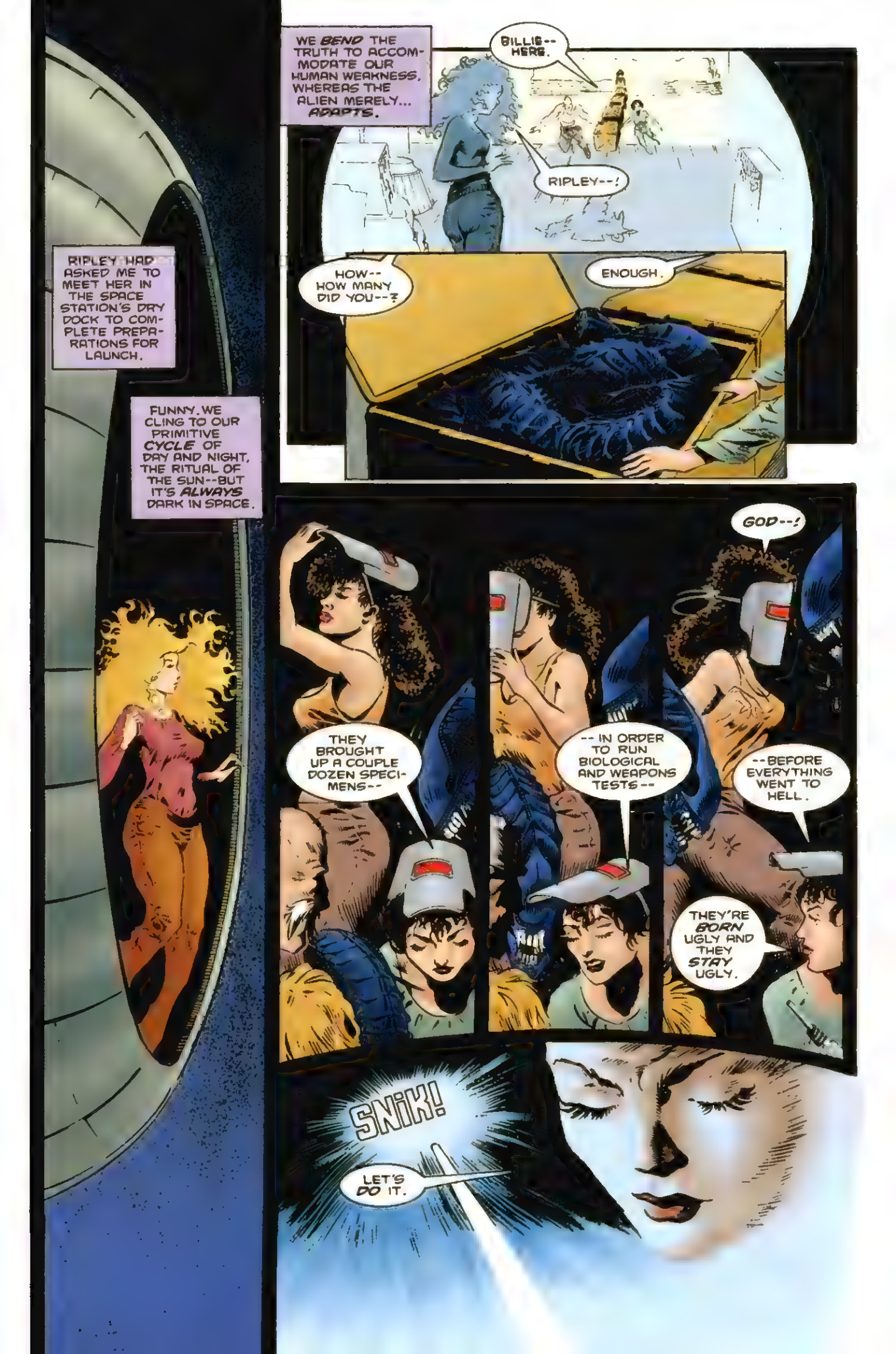
NOT AGAIN!
I WANTED TO STEAL A SHIP, A TRANSPORT, ANYTHING.
WHERE IS IT--?
I COULDN'T BEAR TO WATCH IT HAPPEN AGAIN.
BUT I KNEW THE CHILD'S ONLY HOPE WAS RIPLEY'S WAY--IT WAS THE ONLY HOPE FOR ANY OF US.
EVERYONE I'VE EVER LOVED HAS BEEN TAKEN BY THE ALIEN.
NOT THIS TIME.

JESUS, RIPLEY, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE SERIOUS--
--YOU WANT TO PUT BACK INTO SPACE BECAUSE OF SOME DAMNED DREAM?
IT'S MORE THAN A DREAM, WILKS. SHE'S REAL.
SO WHAT IF SHE IS?
I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF SUICIDE MISSIONS!
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
I'M TALKING ABOUT THOSE THINGS! WE'VE BEEN LUCKY SO FAR, BUT THAT'S BOUND TO RUN OUT...
...KEEP PUSHING AND WE'LL ALL END UP DEAD. OR WORSE.
YOU'RE SCARED.

WE'RE ALL SCARED, RIPLEY.
YOU KNOW WHAT THE ALIEN CAN DO. THAT DOESN'T SCARE YOU?
NOT AS MUCH AS KNOWING THEY'RE STILL OUT THERE--AND THERE'S SOMETHING WE CAN DO TO STOP THEM.
NONE OF US WILL KNOW ANY PEACE UNTIL IT'S OVER--
SO NOW YOU WANT TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE.
EARTH'S GONE, OVERRUN BY THOSE DAMNED THINGS. WHAT'S CHANGED?
WHAT ABOUT YOU, BILLIE? ARE YOU BUYING INTO RIPLEY'S NIGHTMARE--?
I DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.
THIS ISN'T ABOUT ME ANYMORE.
NOTHING.
EVERY-THING.
I'VE SPENT THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS SEEING HER--FEELING HER--
--HOPING THE VISIONS WOULD STOP.

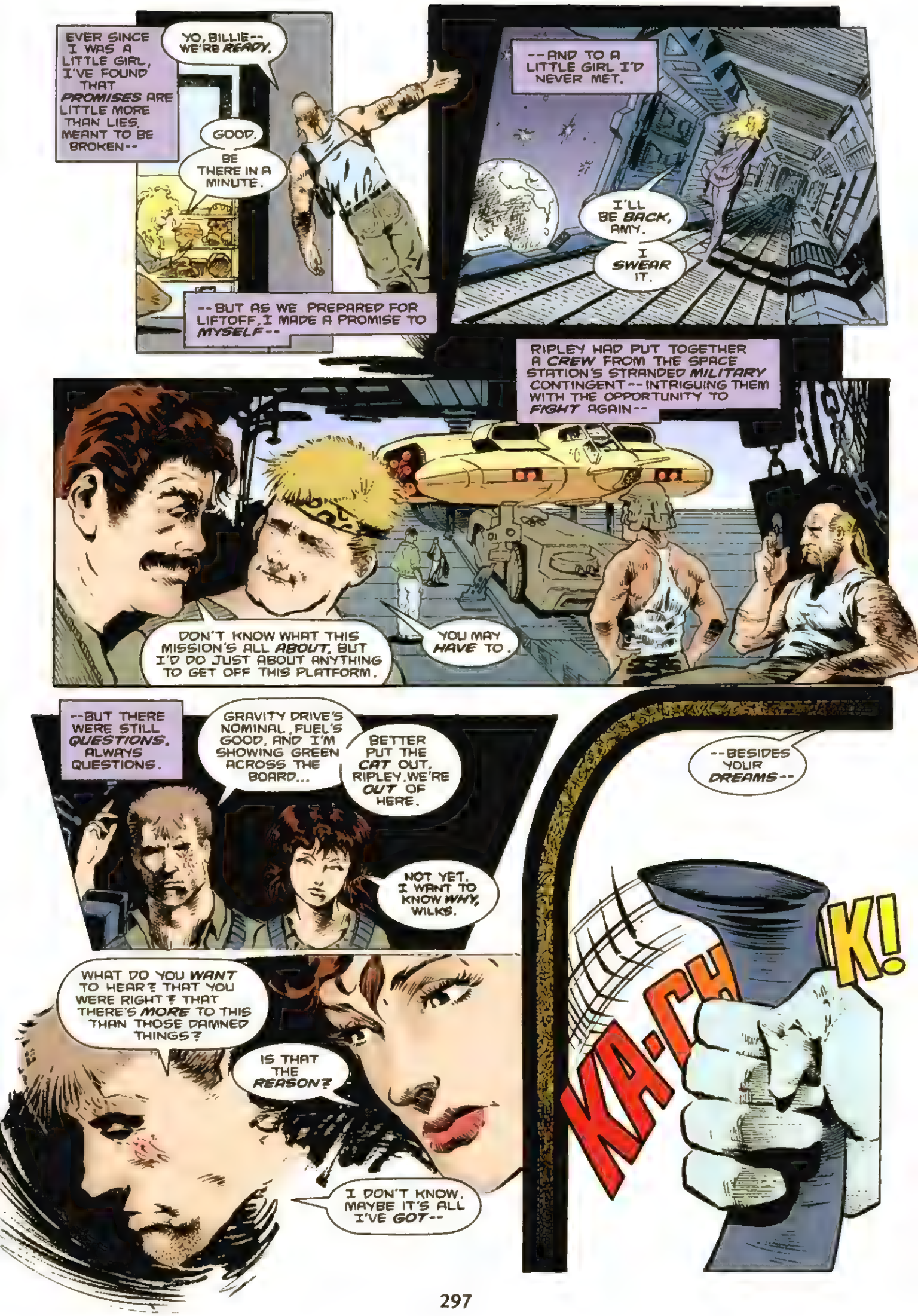
WE SHOULD BE FINISHED BY TONIGHT, BUT--
--I DON'T GET IT. WHAT'S YOUR "RIPLEY" PLANNING TO TRANSPORT IN THIS THING?
WE-- WE'RE NOT EXACTLY SURE.
DON'T GET ME WRONG--IT'S ALL BEEN SEAT-OF-THE-PANTS SINCE THOSE THINGS CUT OUR EARTHSIDE SUPPLY LINE--
--BUT NO REAL SPECS, NO DIMENSIONS, NO WEIGHT PROJECTIONS? THAT'S PUSHING IT.
YOU KNOW AS MUCH AS WE DO.
THEN NOBODY KNOWS SHIT, DO THEY?
C'MON, GUYS-- GIVE ME A BREAK. YOU'RE SETTING SOMETHING UP OFF-WORLD, RIGHT? NEW COLONY, SPACE STATION, WHAT?
ARE YOU A RELIGIOUS MAN, MCFEE?
NEVER HAD MUCH USE FOR IT. WHY?
I'M LEARNING IT'S IMPORTANT TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING-- ANYTHING--
--EVEN DREAMS.

WE'RE AS CRAZY AS RIPLEY--FLYING HALFWAY TO HELL, AND FOR WHAT?
EVEN IF THIS THING EXISTS, WHO SAYS WE'LL BE ABLE TO CATCH IT?
HERE--RIPLEY CONVINCED THE BASE COMMANDER TO HOLD THEM WHILE SHE ARRANGED FOR A SHIP.
STOREROOM'S BEEN UNDER LOCK AND KEY EVER SINCE. SEEMS EVEN THE IDEA OF HAVING THEM ABOARD GIVES THE RANK AND FILE THE JITTERS.
THEY'RE DEAD.
DOESN'T THE CREW UNDERSTAND THAT?
SURE, I GUESS--CHRIST, I DON'T KNOW--
--SOMETIMES I'M NOT SURE I DO.

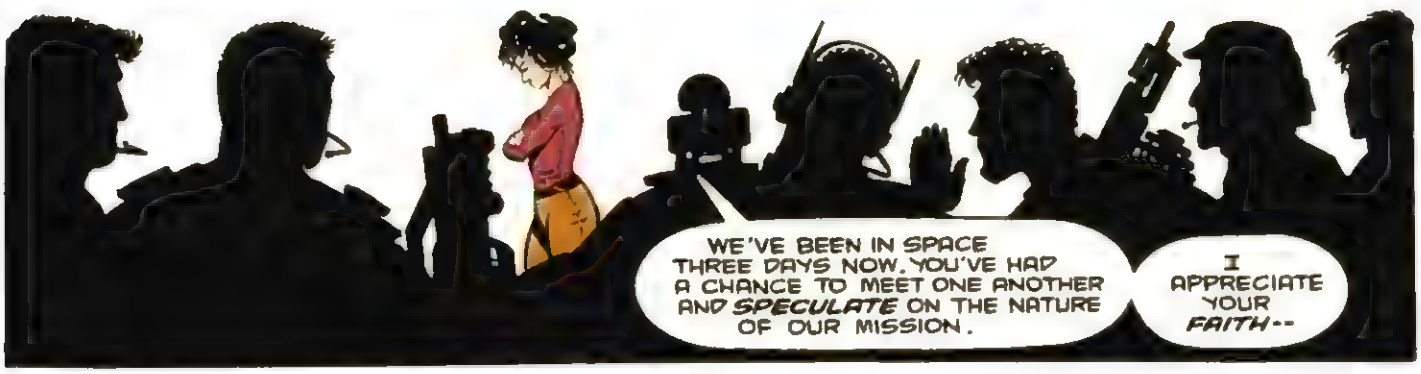

RIPLEY HAD ASKED ME TO MEET HER IN THE SPACE STATION'S DRY DOCK TO COMPLETE PREPARATIONS FOR LAUNCH.
FUNNY. WE CLING TO OUR PRIMITIVE CYCLE OF DAY AND NIGHT, THE RITUAL OF THE SUN--BUT IT'S ALWAYS DARK IN SPACE.
WE BEND THE TRUTH TO ACCOMMODATE OUR HUMAN WEAKNESS, WHEREAS THE ALIEN MERELY... ADAPTS.
BILLIG--HERE.
RIPLEY--!
HOW--HOW MANY DID YOU--?
ENOUGH.
GOD--!
THEY BROUGHT UP A COUPLE DOZEN SPECIMENS--
--IN ORDER TO RUN BIOLOGICAL AND WEAPONS TESTS--
--BEFORE EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL.
THEY'RE BORN UGLY AND THEY STAY UGLY.
SNIK!
LET'S DO IT.

MARINE VESSEL KENT: EYES ONLY FINAL REPORT
SULACO. STUPID GODDAMN NAME FOR A SHIP.
MAYBE THAT'S WHY IT FIT.
JASPER--QUINN--SMITH, IN THE WORLD THEY WERE NOTHING--
--BUT OUT THERE THEY WERE MY FRIENDS.
I WOULD HAVE DIED FOR THEM--
--SHOULD HAVE DIED FOR THEM.
CLICK!
YOU SON OF A BITCH!
YOU HAD TO PUSH IT--MARK ME--SEE HOW FAR I'D GO...
KSSSHH!
WELL, IT'S OVER.
YOU WIN.

CAPTAIN?
COME WITH ME A MINUTE, RIPLEY. WE'VE GOT TO TALK.
I'M NOT GOING TO ALLOW LAUNCH UNTIL YOU FIND A COMMAND-RATED PILOT.
WHEN THIS STARTED, YOU TOLD ME WILKS--
WILKS CHANGED HIS MIND, DON'T QUOTE ME REGULATIONS, CAPTAIN -- IT'S A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT.
THIS ISN'T SOME TECHNICAL QUIBBLE I PULLED OUT OF THE RECRUITING MANUAL -- I'M TALKING COMMON SENSE.
YOUR SHIP'S BEEN RECONFIGURED FOR GRAVITY DRIVE -- YOU JUST DON'T POP BEHIND THE STEERING WHEEL AND TAKE HER OUT FOR A SPIN--
THEN I'D BETTER FLY HER.
"NO," NOW "YES"...
WHAT THE HELL'S YOUR PROBLEM, WILKS?
WHAT DO YOU CARE? RIPLEY NEEDS A PILOT -- I'M VOLUNTEERING...
...AND I'M ALL YOU'VE GOT.

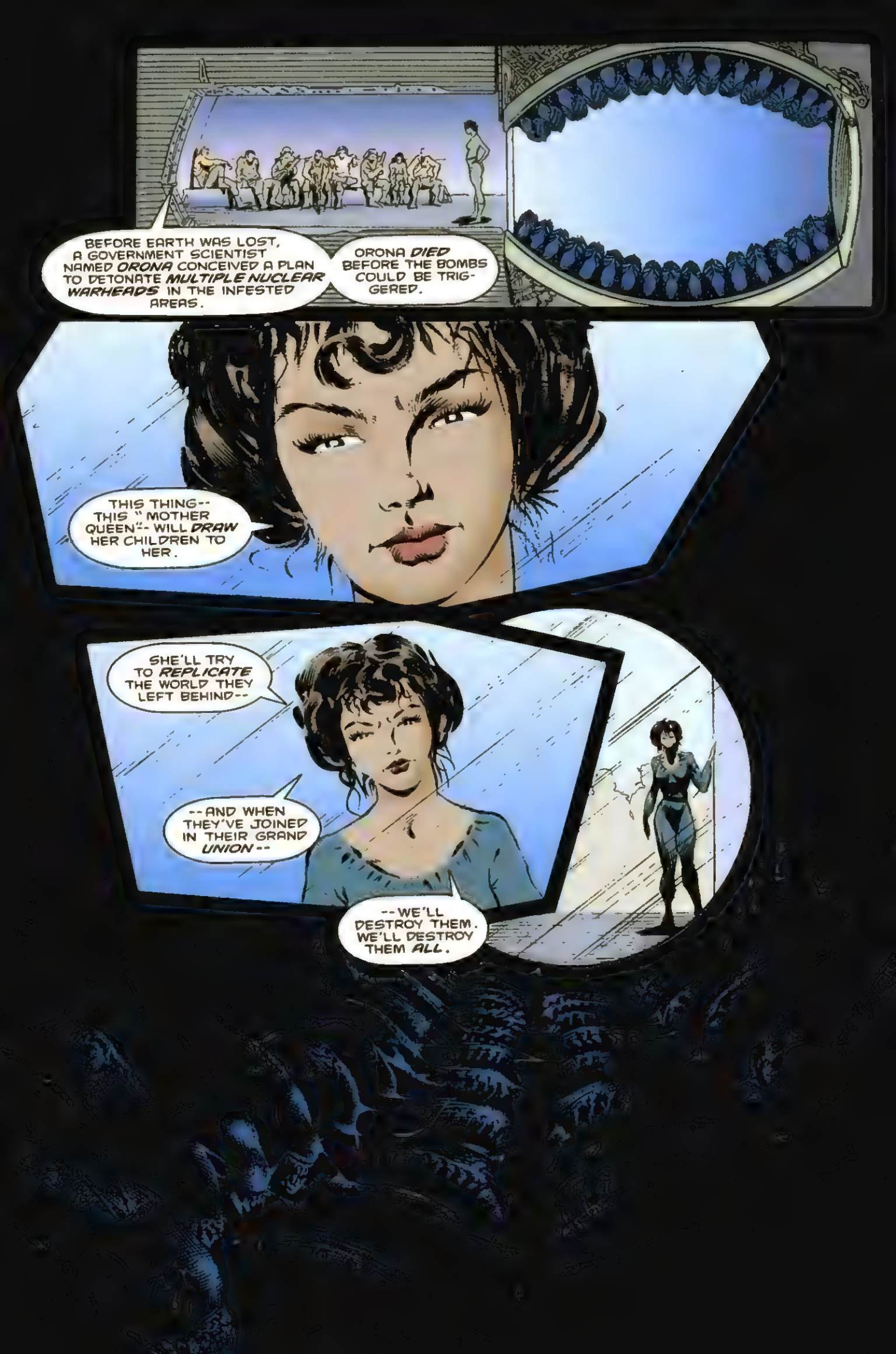

EVER SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I'VE FOUND THAT PROMISES ARE LITTLE MORE THAN LIES, MEANT TO BE BROKEN--
YO, BILLIE-- WE'RE READY.
GOOD.
BE THERE IN A MINUTE.
--BUT AS WE PREPARED FOR LIFTOFF, I MADE A PROMISE TO MYSELF--
--AND TO A LITTLE GIRL I'D NEVER MET.
I'LL BE BACK, AMY.
I SWEAR IT.
RIPLEY HAD PUT TOGETHER A CREW FROM THE SPACE STATION'S STRANDED MILITARY CONTINGENT--INTRIGUING THEM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIGHT AGAIN--
DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS MISSION'S ALL ABOUT, BUT I'D DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING TO GET OFF THIS PLATFORM.
YOU MAY HAVE TO.
--BUT THERE WERE STILL QUESTIONS. ALWAYS QUESTIONS.
GRAVITY DRIVE'S NOMINAL, FUEL'S GOOD, AND I'M SHOWING GREEN ACROSS THE BOARD...
BETTER PUT THE CAT OUT, RIPLEY. WE'RE OUT OF HERE.
NOT YET. I WANT TO KNOW WHY, WILKS.
--BESIDES YOUR DREAMS--
KA-CH
K!
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR? THAT YOU WERE RIGHT? THAT THERE'S MORE TO THIS THAN THOSE DAMNED THINGS?
IS THAT THE REASON?
I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE IT'S ALL I'VE GOT--

"--AND *MY* NIGHTMARES."



--SINCE THAT'S ALL WE'VE REALLY GOT.
TEN YEARS AGO, I MADE CONTACT WITH AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE. IT--IT SPOKE TO ME--TOLD ME OF THE WORLD THAT FIRST SPAWNED THE ALIEN.
THE DRONES ARE ONLY VASSALS, GUIDED BY A SUPERIOR, EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE.
MANY OF US HAVE FELT THIS ALIEN PRESENCE--THE TORTURED, EMPATHETIC BOND IT SHARES WITH ITS CHILDREN--
--ITS HUNGER TO BE WHOLE AGAIN.
THE CREATURES WERE NEVER MEANT TO BE APART. TOGETHER, THEY CREATE THE NEXUS OF ALIEN LIFE. ONE CANNOT ENDURE WITHOUT THE OTHER.
BUT THEY WERE SEPARATED, SPREADING BETWEEN WORLDS LIKE SEEDS IN THE WIND--
--AND THROUGH IT ALL, SHE'S BEEN CALLING TO THEM... CALLING THEM BACK.
SO, MOMMA MISSES HER KIDS--TOUGH SHIT.
WHAT THE HELL ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

THE BITCH WANTS HER BABIES. WE CAN'T BRING THEM TO HER--
--SO WE'LL BRING HER TO EARTH--
--IN THIS.
THE SHELLS ARE IMPERVIOUS TO THE ALIEN'S ACID--BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, THEY'LL SUGGEST HOME--FAMILY--
--HER LOST BROOD.
THAT'S WHY YOU DRAGGED US OUT HERE? TO PLAY CHAUFFEUR--TO BRING MORE OF THOSE THINGS TO EARTH FOR A FAMILY DAMN REUNION--? YOU MUST BE OUT OF YOUR--
JESUS--ORONA'S BOMBS...


BEFORE EARTH WAS LOST, A GOVERNMENT SCIENTIST NAMED ORONA CONCEIVED A PLAN TO DETONATE MULTIPLE NUCLEAR WARHEADS IN THE INFESTED AREAS.
ORONA DIED BEFORE THE BOMBS COULD BE TRIGGERED.
THIS THING-- THIS "MOTHER QUEEN"-- WILL DRAW HER CHILDREN TO HER.
SHE'LL TRY TO REPLICATE THE WORLD THEY LEFT BEHIND--
--AND WHEN THEY'VE JOINED IN THEIR GRAND UNION--
--WE'LL DESTROY THEM. WE'LL DESTROY THEM ALL.

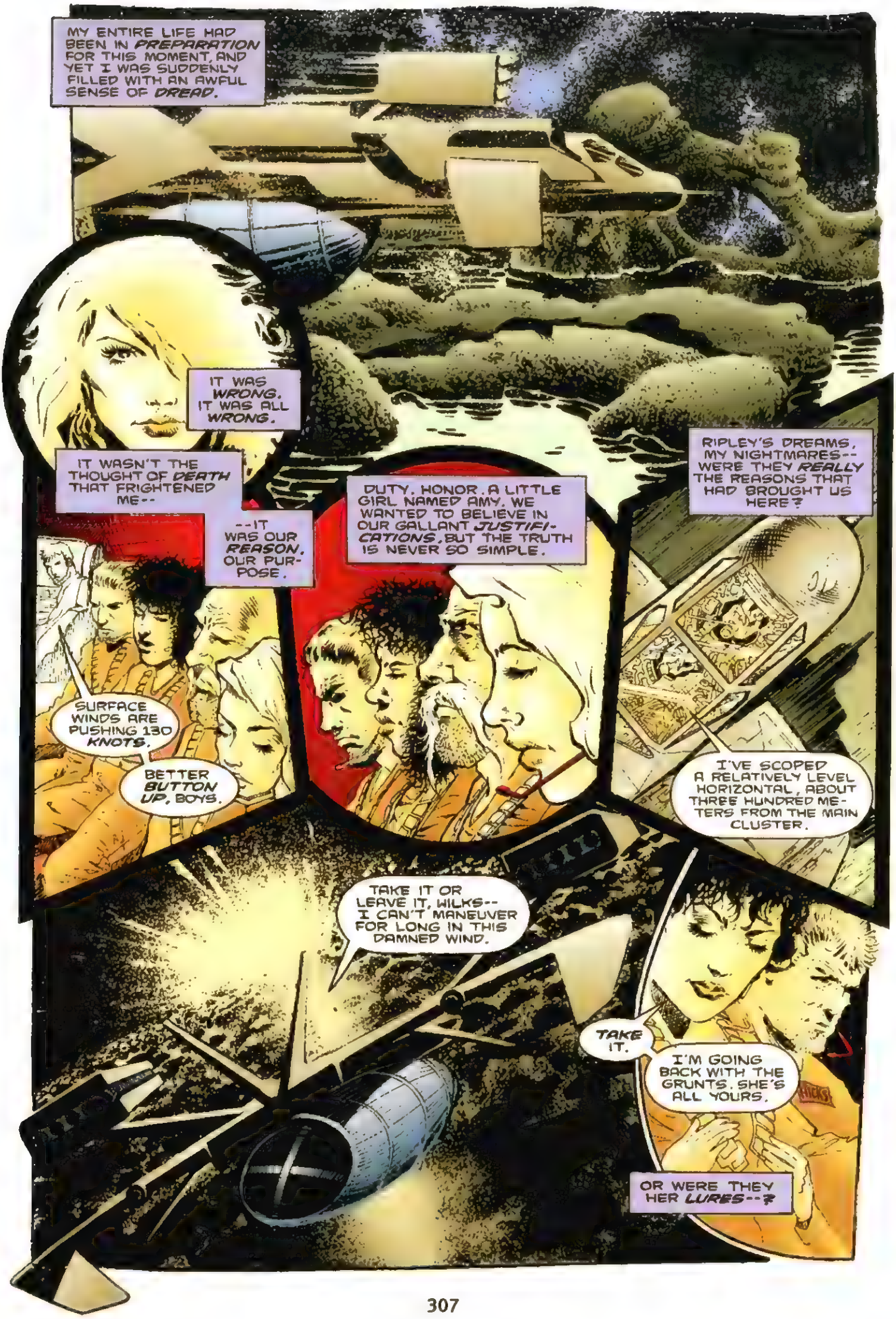
GATEWAY PLATFORM, TWO DAYS LATER.
UHH, CAPTAIN MCQUADE, THIS IS DONNELL, DECK THREE. YOU'D BETTER HAVE A LOOK AT THIS.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT, DONNELL?
I-- I'M NOT SURE, CAPTAIN.
AT FIRST I BLAMED THE READINGS ON FAULTY MONITORING EQUIPMENT--
--BUT LOOK AT THIS. WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT SOME ISOLATED EVENT-- IT'S GLOBAL.
JESUS.
THIS IS CRAZY-- THESE SURFACE TEMPERATURES ARE FAR BELOW CLIMATIC NORMS...
THAT'S NOT ALL. ATMOSPHERIC COMPOSITION, MOISTURE PATTERNS, WIND FLUCTUATIONS--
--THEY'RE MIMICKING THE SORTS OF READINGS YOU'D SEE IN THE EMBRYONIC STAGES OF A TERRAFORMING PROJECT.
CRAZY THING IS, I'VE LOCALIZED THE ENERGY SOURCE--
--SIR, IT'S PLASMA-BASED-- AND IT'S COMING FROM SPACE!

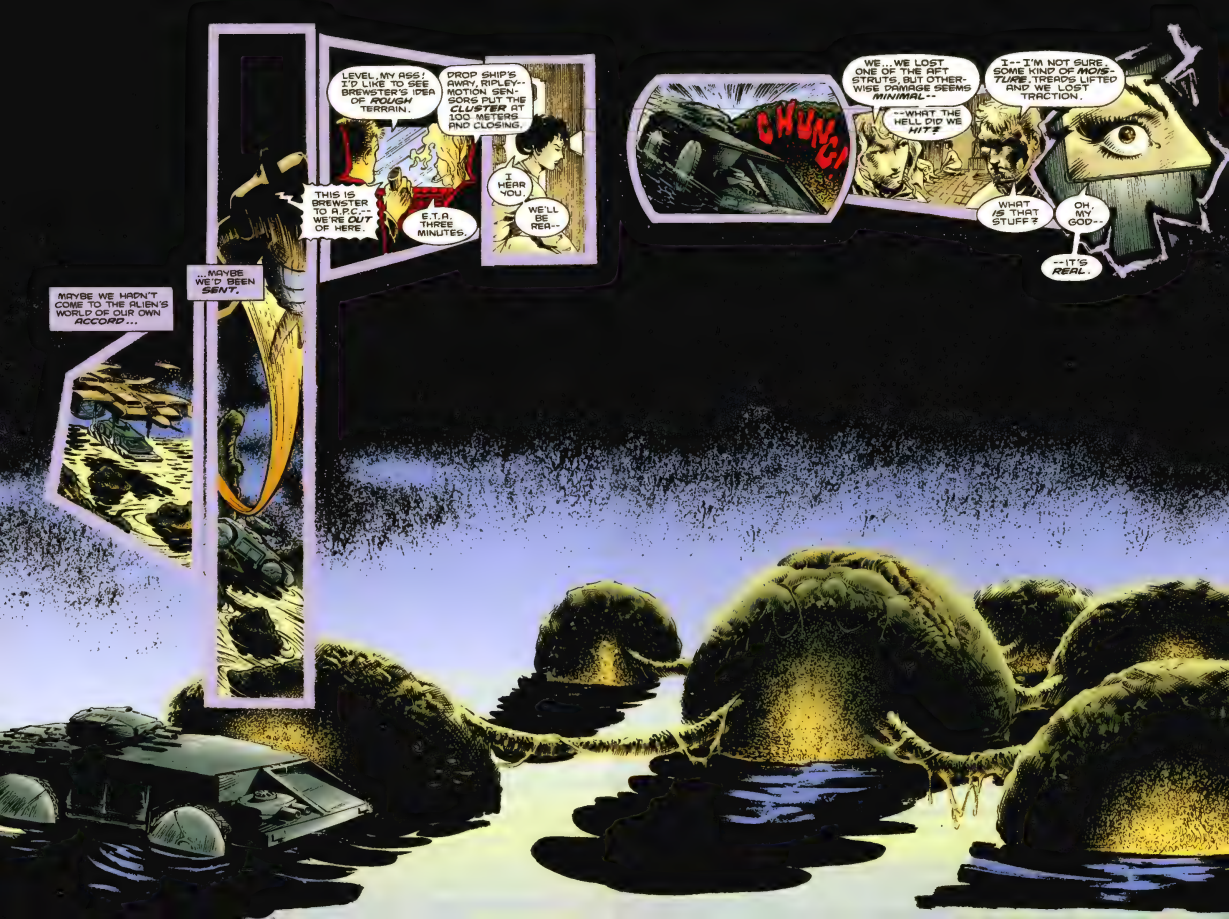
WITH THE SHIP'S GRAVITY DRIVE PROPELLING US AT HUNDREDS OF TIMES THE SPEED OF LIGHT, WE WERE ORBITING RIPLEY'S "DREAM" WITHIN A MATTER OF DAYS.
THE CLOSER WE CAME, THE MORE I FELT THE ALIEN'S PRESENCE--
--THE MORE I KNEW IT FELT MINE.
BILLIE-- WE'RE ALMOST READY.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
TULLY--? GOD, I DON'T KNOW...
...I--I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT EARTH.
I NEVER REALLY CONSIDERED IT MY HOME. I FEEL I'VE BEEN ADRIFT ALL THESE YEARS, SEARCHING...
IT'S THE SAME FOR ALL OF US: ME, RIPLEY, WILKS--
--THE ALIEN.
IT'S FUNNY. WE SEE THEM AS INTRUDERS ON EARTH, TAKING SOMETHING PRECIOUS AWAY FROM US, BUT--
--MAYBE WE'RE THE INTRUDERS, TULLY.
MAYBE THEIR SEARCH IS OVER-- AND EARTH WAS MEANT TO BE THEIRS ALL ALONG.

WHOSE IDEA WERE THE SUITS?
RIPLEY'S. SHE CONVINCED CAPTAIN MCQUADE TO CANNIBALIZE THE PLATFORM'S POWER LOADERS AND MODIFY THEM FOR MILITARY DUTY.
ROBINSON
CARVEY
SAYS SHE'S HAD EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SORT OF THING.
I GUESS SHE LIKES HAVING AN EDGE.
GOOD.
CRUNCH!
FUEL NOMINAL, ELECTRICALS UP-- MAKE SURE WE HAVE HARD COPY OFF THE DROP SHIP'S NAVIGATIONAL, JUST IN CASE.
CHRIST, BREW, HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THE MATRIX ON THE DROP SITE?
I'M PICKING UP ROCK FORMATIONS THAT MAKE MT. EVEREST LOOK LIKE A BAD DIVOT.
BREWSTER
HEY, IF IT WAS EASY, ANYBODY COULD DO IT.
BESIDES, TOPOGRAPHY'S THE A.P.C.'S PROBLEM. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS DROP THEM.
YEAH.
AND PICK UP WHATEVER THE HELL THEY FIND DOWN THERE.

I...
I'M SORRY, HONEY.
RIPLEY-- THEY'RE READY.
YEAH.
FINE. BE THERE IN A MINUTE.
I, uh, HOPE THEY SECTORED THE A.P.C.'S COM-LINK. THOSE LOW-FREQUENCY JOBS TEND TO SCATTER AT THE FIRST SIGN OF--
JESUS.
RIPLEY, IS THIS A PICTURE OF YOUR--?
MY DAUGHTER. IT WAS TAKEN A COUPLE OF WEEKS BEFORE I REPORTED ABOARD THE NOSTROMO.
SHE-- SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL.
YEAH. THE PSYCHS WERE CONCERNED WHEN I DIDN'T SHOW AN "OVERT EMOTIONAL RESPONSE" TO HER DEATH-- BUT WHY SHOULD I? THE OLD WOMAN IN THEIR FILES WAS A STRANGER TO ME.
I SPENT HER WHOLE LIFE DRIFTING THROUGH EMPTY SPACE--LOST IN YEARS OF PERFECT HIBERNATION, WHILE SHE GREW OLD AND DIED.
THE ALIEN STOLE THE TIME WE SHOULD HAVE HAD TOGETHER.
SOMETIMES I THINK THOSE THINGS HAVE AS MUCH RIGHT TO SURVIVE AS ANY OF US. SOMETIMES I WONDER WHAT GIVES US THE ARROGANCE TO CHALLENGE THEIR EXISTENCE.
THEN I LOOK AT MY LITTLE GIRL.
AND I KNOW.

GLAD YOU COULD STOP BY, RIPLEY--ESPECIALLY SINCE THIS IS *YOUR* PARTY.
BREWSTER'S PICKED UP A CLUSTER OF MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. VERY ERRATIC--MIGHT EVEN BE SEISMIC.
PROPER PROCEDURE WOULD BE TO DROP A ROBOT *PROBE*--BUT I DON'T SEE ANY POINT BOTHERING WITH COUNT-DOWNS AND TRIPLE-REDUNDANT *CROSS-CHECKS*.
CLICK
WE'RE EITHER READY--OR WE DIE...
"...LET'S NOT KEEP THEM *WAITING*."


MY ENTIRE LIFE HAD BEEN IN *PREPARATION* FOR THIS MOMENT, AND YET I WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH AN AWFUL SENSE OF *DREAD*.
IT WAS *WRONG*. IT WAS ALL *WRONG*.
IT WASN'T THE THOUGHT OF *DEATH* THAT FRIGHTENED ME--
--IT WAS OUR *REASON*, OUR PURPOSE.
DUTY. HONOR. A LITTLE GIRL NAMED AMY. WE WANTED TO BELIEVE IN OUR GALLANT *JUSTIFICATIONS*, BUT THE TRUTH IS NEVER SO SIMPLE.
RIPLEY'S DREAMS, MY NIGHTMARES-- WERE THEY *REALLY* THE REASONS THAT HAD BROUGHT US HERE?
SURFACE WINDS ARE PUSHING 130 *KNOTS*.
BETTER *BUTTON UP*, BOYS.
I'VE SCOPED A RELATIVELY LEVEL HORIZONTAL, ABOUT THREE HUNDRED METERS FROM THE MAIN CLUSTER.
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT, WILKS-- I CAN'T MANEUVER FOR LONG IN THIS DAMNED WIND.
TAKE IT.
I'M GOING BACK WITH THE GRUNTS. SHE'S ALL YOURS.
OR WERE THEY HER *LURES*--?


MAYBE WE HADN'T COME TO THE ALIEN'S WORLD OF OUR OWN ACCORD...
...MAYBE WE'D BEEN SENT.
THIS IS BREWSTER TO A.P.C.-- WE'RE OUT OF HERE.
LEVEL, MY ASS! I'D LIKE TO SEE BREWSTER'S IDEA OF ROUGH TERRAIN.
E.T.A. THREE MINUTES.
DROP SHIP'S AWAY, RIPLEY-- MOTION SENSORS PUT THE CLUTTER AT 100 METERS AND CLOSING.
I HEAR YOU.
WE'LL BE REA--
CHUNG!
WE... WE LOST ONE OF THE APT STRUTS, BUT OTHERWISE DAMAGE SEEMS MINIMAL--
--WHAT THE HELL DID WE HIT?
I--I'M NOT SURE. SOME KIND OF MOISTURE. TREADS LIFTED AND WE LOST TRACTION.
WHAT IS THAT STUFF?
OH, MY GOD--
--IT'S REAL.

I DON'T REMEMBER VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS DETAIL. DO YOU REMEMBER ME VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS DETAIL?
WHO GIVES A SHIT?
"JUST BE CAREFUL OUT THERE."
WE'VE COME TOO FAR TO LOSE IT ALL NOW.
HELL, TULLY, THOSE THINGS AREN'T INTERESTED IN AN UGLY OLD BASTARD LIKE ME--
--THEY LIKE 'EM YOUNG.
ATMOSPHERE'S LOW ON OXYGEN AND HIGH ON CONTAMINATES--BREATHABLE, BUT JUST BARELY. USE THE ONBOARD MASKS WHEN YOU CAN.
WE DON'T WANT ANY DEAD HEROES. NEWT'S MONITORING THE CLUSTER RELATIVE TO YOUR POSITION, SO LISTEN UP--
--AND STAY AWAKE!
FALK
CARVEY
DUTTSON
HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE READINGS LOOK LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A HYPERTENSIVE'S HOW-TO MANUAL...
...THEY MAY DO A LOT OF THINGS, BUT SLEEPING WON'T BE ONE OF THEM.

THIS...JELLY... ISN'T RELATED TO ANY SURFACE ANOMALY. IT SEEMS TO BE EMANATING FROM THE FORMATION'S CORE.
WHAT ARE THESE THINGS? THEY'RE TOO LARGE TO BE ALIEN EGG SACS.
WHATEVER THE HELL, IT'S DEFINITELY ORGANIC--AND IT'S OOZING THAT TRANSLUCENT DISCHARGE LIKE A SON OF A BITCH!
I CAN-- I CAN ALMOST SEE INSIDE...
OH GOD-- I'M PICKING UP MOVEMENT FROM THE FIVE EXTERNAL CLUSTERS.
WILKS-- IT'S COMING FROM THOSE PODS!
FALK! GET OUT OF THERE-- NOW!
FALK
CARVER
...THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE--
WHA--?

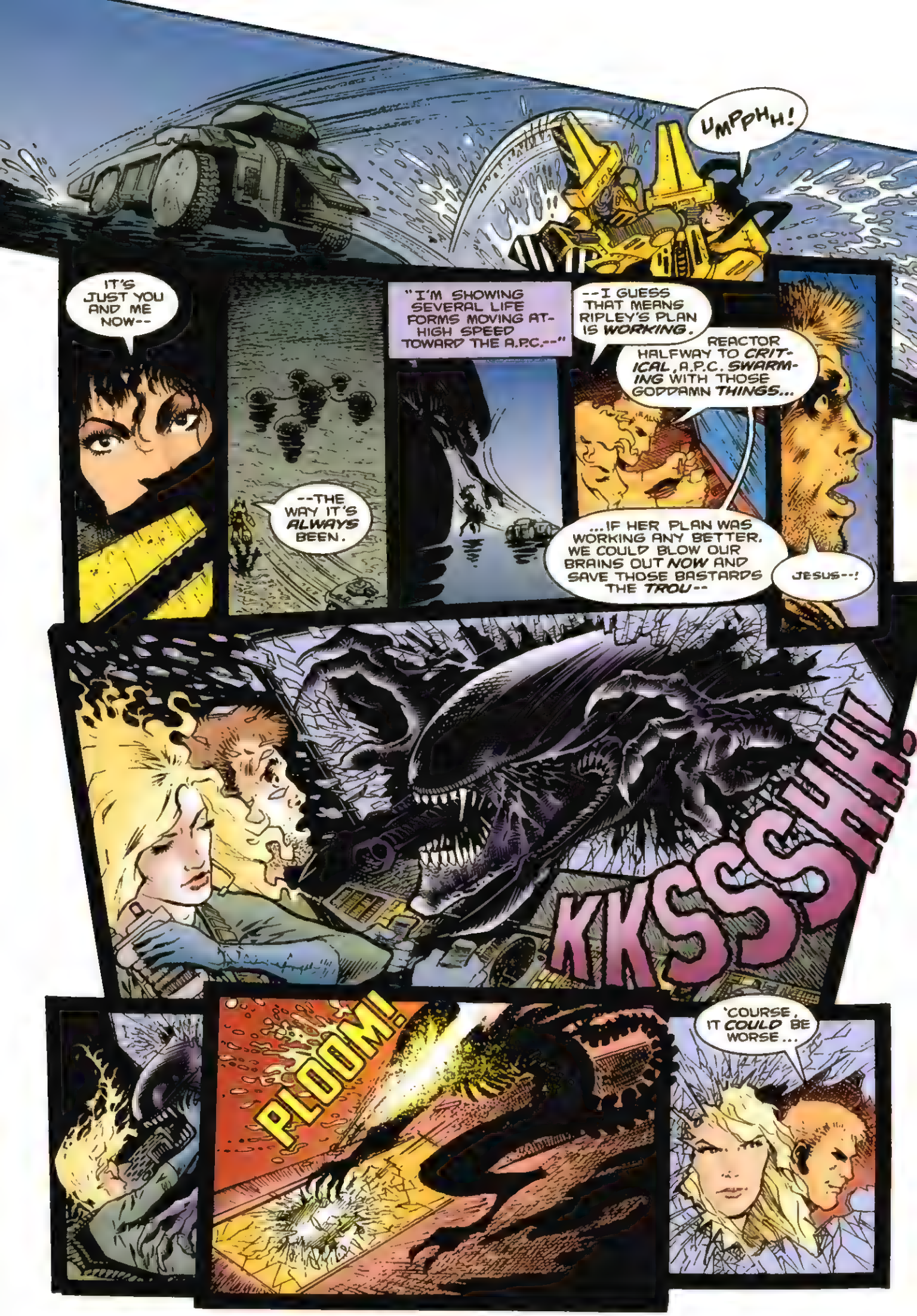
AGHHHH--!
FALK! JESUS, SOMEONE HELP ME--!
GET IT OFF ME-- GET IT-- AHH-- AHGGG --!
GAAAAAAA
CARVEY!
THOSE POWER LOADERS ARE BUILT OUT OF ALLOYED STEEL, AND THEY'RE TEARING THEM APART LIKE TISSUE PAPER!
THE GODDAMN THINGS MUST HAVE EVOLVED--
CARVEY
--THE QUESTION IS, HOW MUCH?
AAA

WELL, I THINK WE FOUND THEM...
WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE A.P.C.! IF THEY--
DUNSTON!
AHHHH--
WHAM
WHAMWHAMWHAM
YOU SON OF A--!
DIE!
DIE, GODDAMN IT!
DI-

GAAAHH--UK!
SNAP!
KISS THIS, BOYO!
BRRRIIPP!
I'M GETTING MOTION SENSOR READINGS FROM ALL THE EXTERNAL PODS--MUST BE MORE OF THE THINGS THAT ATTACKED CARVEY.
FALK
CARVEY
ROBBINS
HELL--MAYBE WE SHOULD HAVE SENT IN THAT PROBE.
RAISE BREWSTER IN THE DROP SHIP--TELL HIM WE'RE LOOKING AT AN EMERGENCY DUST-OFF, LIKE NOW.
READ YOU, A.P.C., BUT NO WAY CAN WE PUT DOWN AT YOUR CURRENT POSITION.
ROLL BACK TO THE INITIAL DROP POINT AND WE'LL PICK YOU UP GENTLE AS A KITTEN.
RIPLEY--WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU HEARD WILKS--WE'RE GOING TO GRAB FALK AND BURN THE HELL OUT OF HERE!
I KNOW SHE'S THERE.
I DIDN'T COME THIS FAR JUST TO LET HER SLIP AWAY.

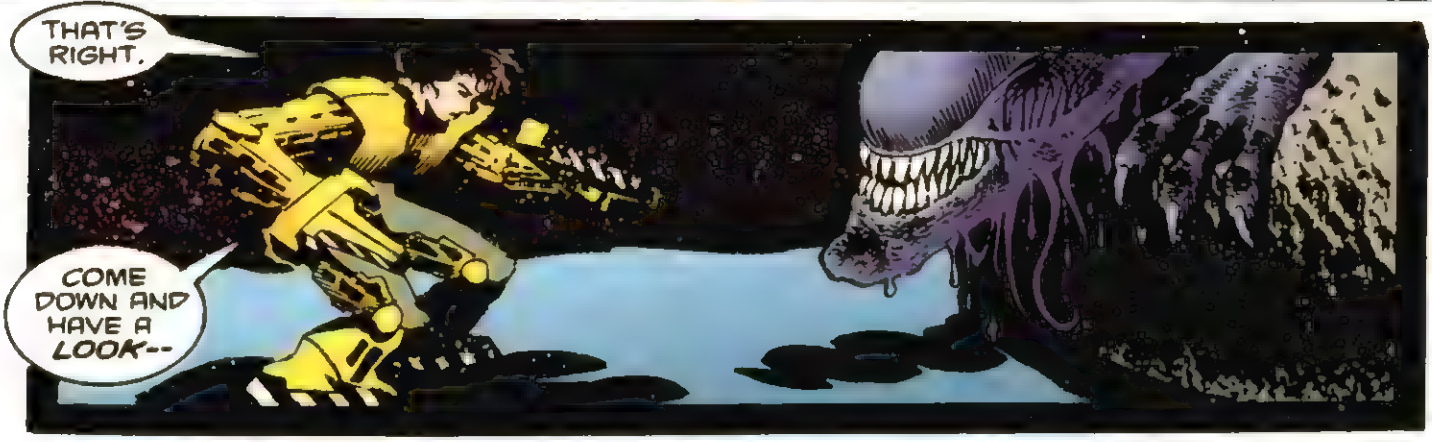
SPLASH!
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, I'M HERE--
--DON'T MAKE ME KNOCK, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!
THANKS FOR THE SHOWER!
I'LL TOSS YOU A TOWEL ONCE WE'RE BACK IN ORBIT.
WRUNCH!
JESUS--!
WHAT IN HELL WERE THOSE THINGS? THEY'RE FASTER AND STRONGER THAN ANYTHING WE FOUND ON EARTH--
--AND I THOUGHT THEY WERE PRETTY ROUGH.
THEY'RE HER CHOSEN FEW--
BRRRRIPP!

"--THEY'RE TRYING TO PROTECT HER."
WHUMP
WHAT TH--?
SOMETHING'S OPENED OUR REACTOR'S INTERNAL COOLING SYSTEM--CORE TEMPERATURE'S RISING BY THE SECOND!
YEAH. AND MANUAL CONTROL'S FOR SHIT--
--LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT VISITORS ON THE HULL.
RIPLEY--WE'RE NEVER GOING TO MAKE IT TO THE DROP SITE.
THIS IS YOUR SHOW--ANY IDEAS?
YEAH. GIVE ME FIVE MINUTES OF COVER TO GET INTO THE THING'S NEST--
--AND WE'LL FINISH IT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
RIGHT. JUST PULL OVER AND "DROP YOU OFF."
THOSE BASTARDS WILL BE ALL OVER US IN A SECOND--!
YOU--YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL --HOW MUCH YOU AND BILLIE MEAN TO ME...
HEY, SCREW IT, RIPLEY--
--SAVE IT FOR WHEN YOU GET BACK.
SO WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT STOPPING? AS SOON AS I'M OUT, SEAL THE HATCH.

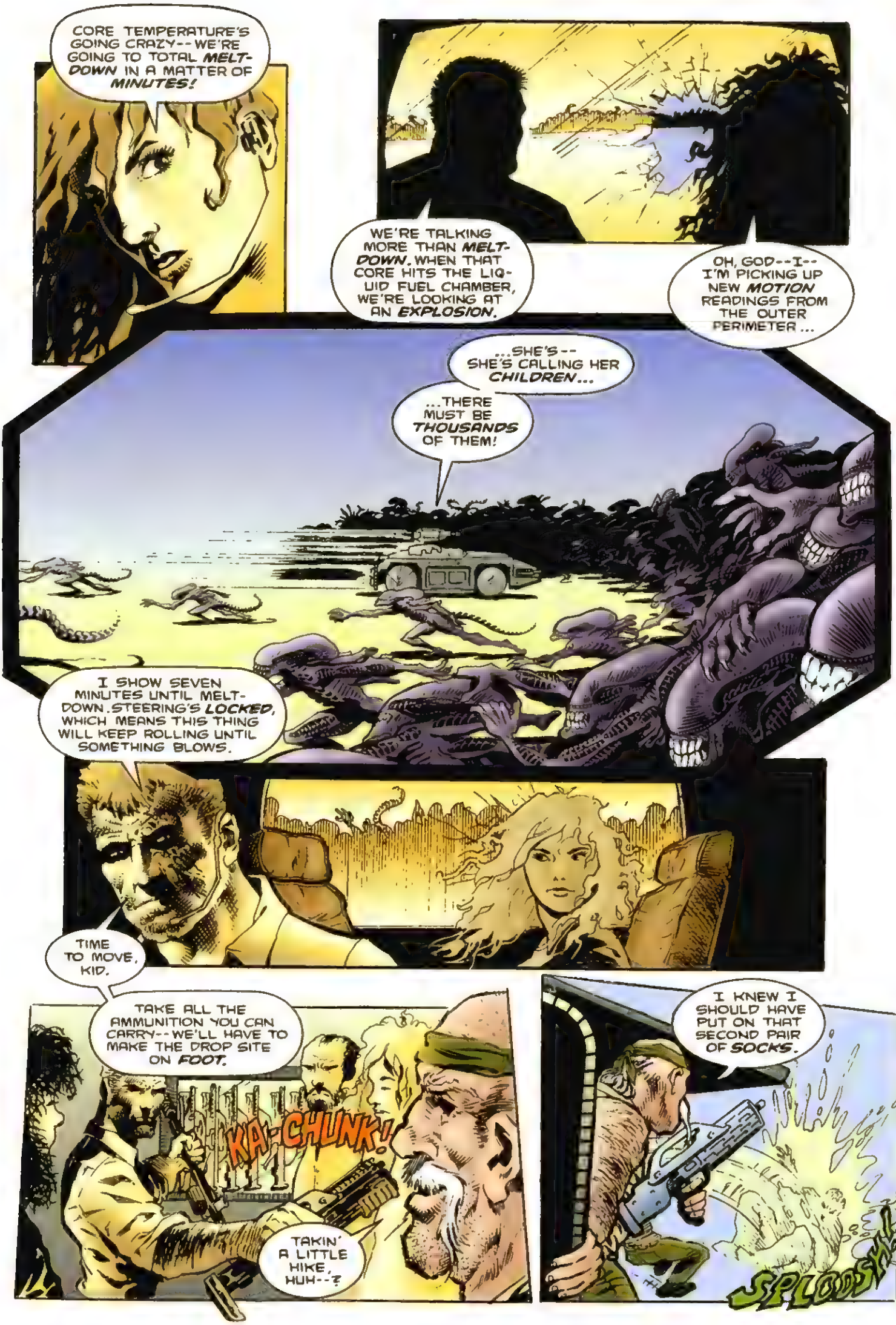

UMPPHH!
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW--
--THE WAY IT'S ALWAYS BEEN.
"I'M SHOWING SEVERAL LIFE FORMS MOVING AT-HIGH SPEED TOWARD THE A.P.C.--"
--I GUESS THAT MEANS RIPLEY'S PLAN IS WORKING.
REACTOR HALFWAY TO CRITICAL, A.P.C. SWARMING WITH THOSE GODDAMN THINGS...
...IF HER PLAN WAS WORKING ANY BETTER, WE COULD BLOW OUR BRAINS OUT NOW AND SAVE THOSE BASTARDS THE TROU--
JESUS--!
KKSSSHH!!
PLOOM!
'COURSE, IT COULD BE WORSE...

"...WE COULD BE OUT THERE-- WITH RIPLEY."
I WONDER HOW LONG THEY'VE BEEN WAITING...
...HOW LONG THEY'VE ACHED FOR RELEASE...
GOD--I CAN FEEL YOU ALL AROUND ME...
WHACK!
...WHY DON'T YOU SHOW YOUR-SELF--?
EXPLAIN YOUR WORTHLESS EXISTENCE-- WHAT YOU DID TO THE CREW OF THE NOSTROMO, THE SOLDIERS FROM THE SULACO...
CHAK!
...EXPLAIN EARTH...
...EXPLAIN NEWT...

...EXPLAIN MY DAUGHTER!


THAT'S RIGHT.
COME DOWN AND HAVE A LOOK--

WHACK
--YOU BITCH!
DROP SHIP, THIS IS RIPLEY.
ZERO MY POSITION AND PREPARE TO EFFECT PICK-UP.
I TOLD WILKS AND I'LL TELL YOU--THERE'S NO PLACE TO LAND--!
WE CAN'T EFFECT SHIT--
SO DON'T PUT DOWN--BUT GET THAT SHIP OVER MY COORDI-NATES, NOW!

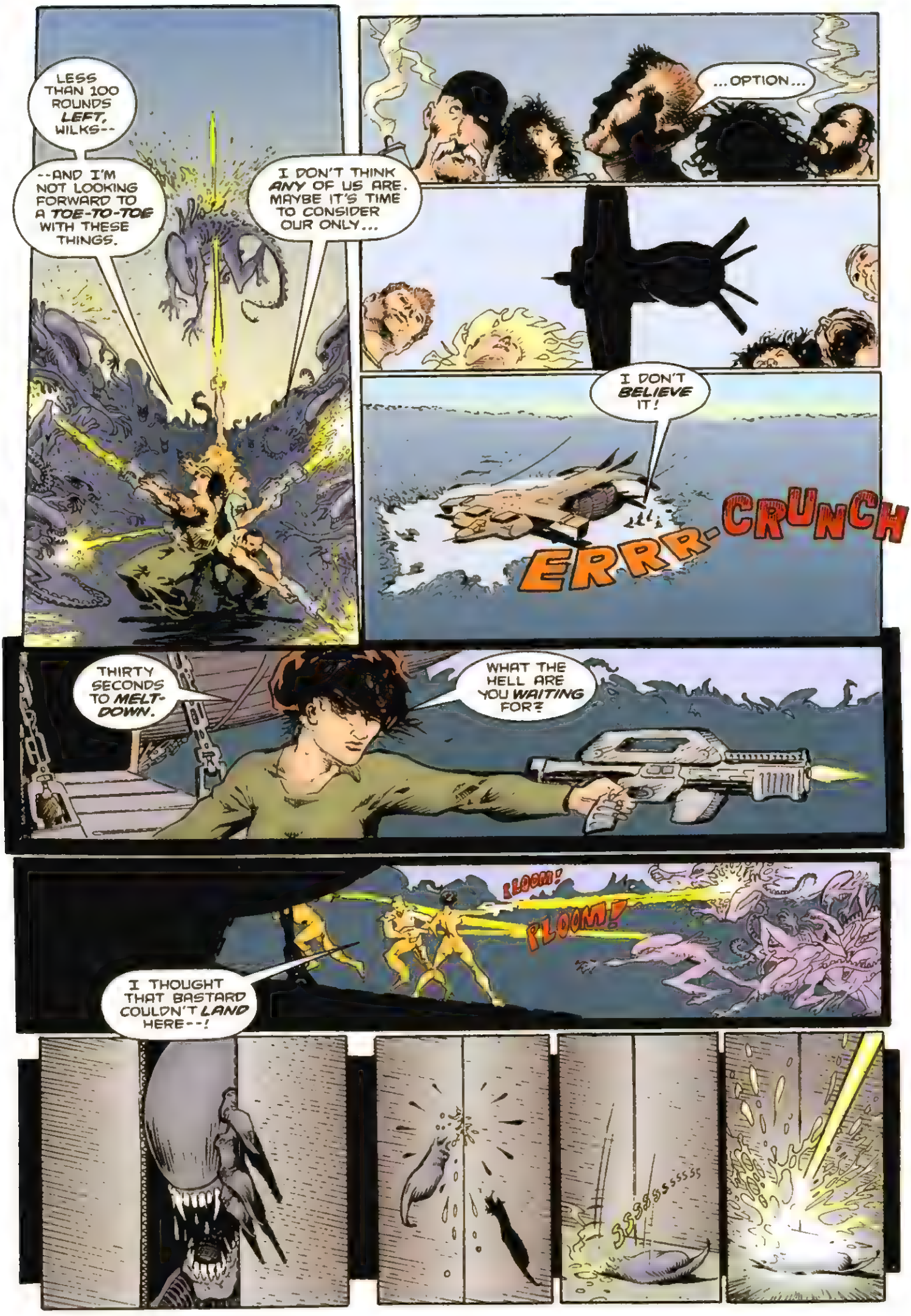

CORE TEMPERATURE'S GOING CRAZY--WE'RE GOING TO TOTAL MELTDOWN IN A MATTER OF MINUTES!
WE'RE TALKING MORE THAN MELTDOWN. WHEN THAT CORE HITS THE LIQUID FUEL CHAMBER, WE'RE LOOKING AT AN EXPLOSION.
OH, GOD--I--I'M PICKING UP NEW MOTION READINGS FROM THE OUTER PERIMETER...
...SHE'S--SHE'S CALLING HER CHILDREN...
...THERE MUST BE THOUSANDS OF THEM!
I SHOW SEVEN MINUTES UNTIL MELTDOWN. STEERING'S LOCKED, WHICH MEANS THIS THING WILL KEEP ROLLING UNTIL SOMETHING BLOWS.
TIME TO MOVE, KID.
TAKE ALL THE AMMUNITION YOU CAN CARRY--WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE THE DROP SITE ON FOOT.
KA-CHUNK!
TAKIN' A LITTLE HIKE, HUH--?
I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE PUT ON THAT SECOND PAIR OF SOCKS.
SPLOOSH!

EVERYBODY STAY TOGETHER!
CONSERVE YOUR AMMUNITION-- FIRE AT SPECIFIC TARGETS.
SON OF A--!
BRRRIPP!
YOU MEAN LIKE THIS--?
THEY'RE ALL AROUND US...
IT'S OVER, WILKS-- YOU KNOW THAT WE'LL NEVER MAKE THE DROP SITE!
FIVE MORE MINUTES AND THE A.P.C. WILL DETONATE. THEN--GUESS WHAT...
...NEITHER WILL THEY!

RIPLEY, THIS IS BREWSTER. I'LL BRING HER IN AS LOW AS WE CAN AND--
JESUS-- WHAT IN HELL IS THAT?
OPEN THE CONTAINMENT CHAMBER!
JUST A LITTLE LOWER... COME ON, COME ON!
CHUNK!
ALL RIGHT-- UP-- NOW!
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT, BITCH--
--WE'RE GOING FOR A LITTLE RIDE.

GET READY TO CLOSE...
...ON MY ORDER...
EMERGENCY RETRACT
AGHHHH--!
NOW! SEAL IT!
CHUNK!
HOW'S IT FEEL, YOU SHIT--?

YOU'RE MINE NOW.
HURRY UP-- BREWSTER WANTS US ON THE BRIDGE.
WE'RE GETTING THE HELL OUT OF HERE.
THE A.P.C.'S GONE CRITICAL-- CORE DETONATION IN LESS THAN TWO MINUTES.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHAT ABOUT BILLIE AND THE OTHERS--?
THE SQUAD'S PINNED DOWN IN ONE OF THE NARROW VALLEYS--BREWSTER SAYS IT'S TOO TIGHT FOR A PICKUP.
RIPLEY...
LOOK, THERE'S JUST NO WAY WE CAN PUT DOWN. THERE'S NO GODDAMN ROOM-- AND THERE'S NO TIME!
FIND A WAY.
AND MAKE IT QUICK.
CLICK!


LESS THAN 100 ROUNDS LEFT, WILKS--
--AND I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO A TOE-TO-TOE WITH THESE THINGS.
I DON'T THINK ANY OF US ARE. MAYBE IT'S TIME TO CONSIDER OUR ONLY...
...OPTION...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
ERRR-CRUNCH
THIRTY SECONDS TO MELT-DOWN.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
PLOOM!
PLOOM!
I THOUGHT THAT BASTARD COULDN'T LAND HERE--!
SSSSSSSSSSS

I CONVINCED HIM TO *RE-CONSIDER.*

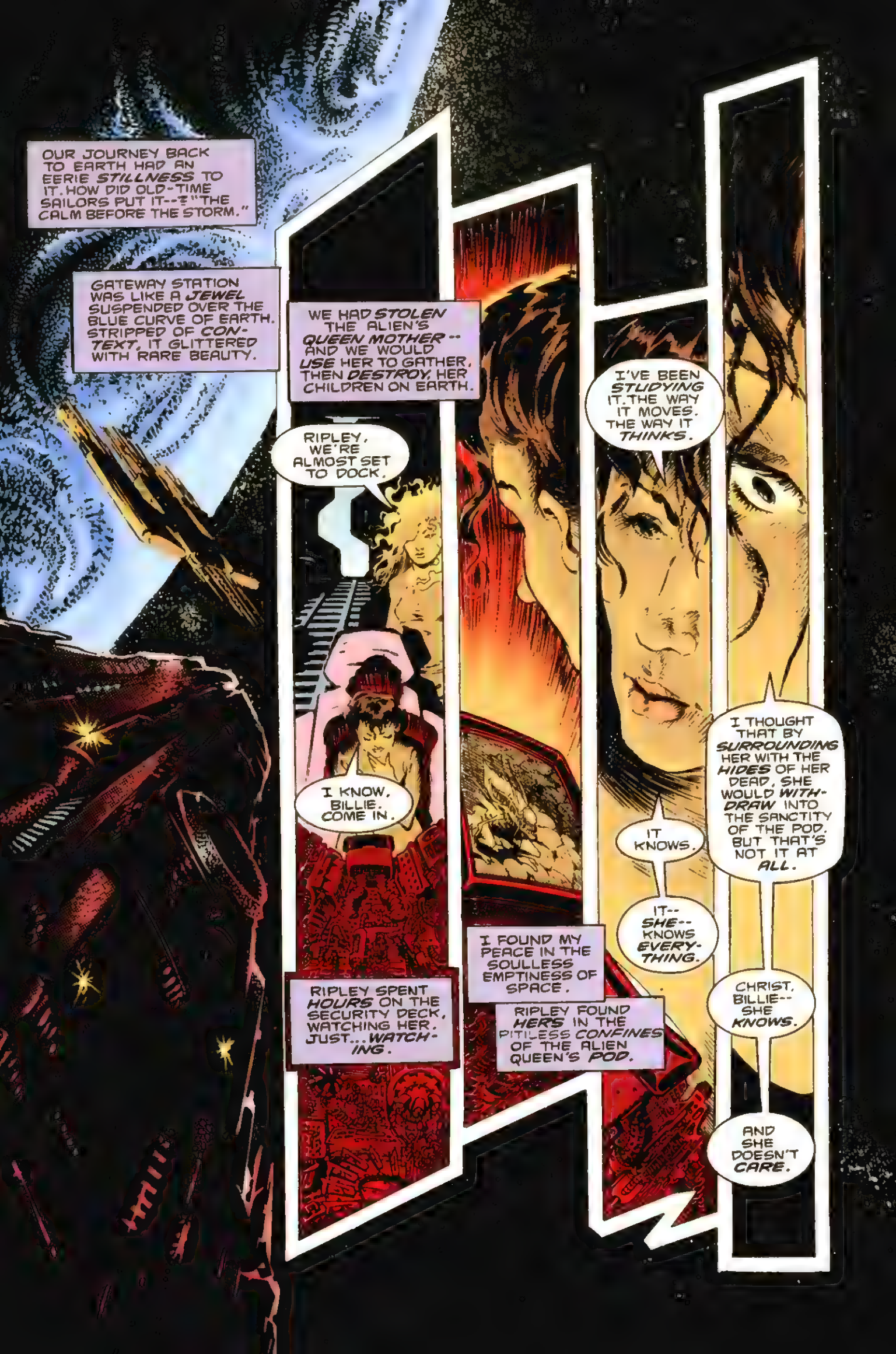
DETONATION IN FIVE SECONDS. BRACE YOURSELVES.

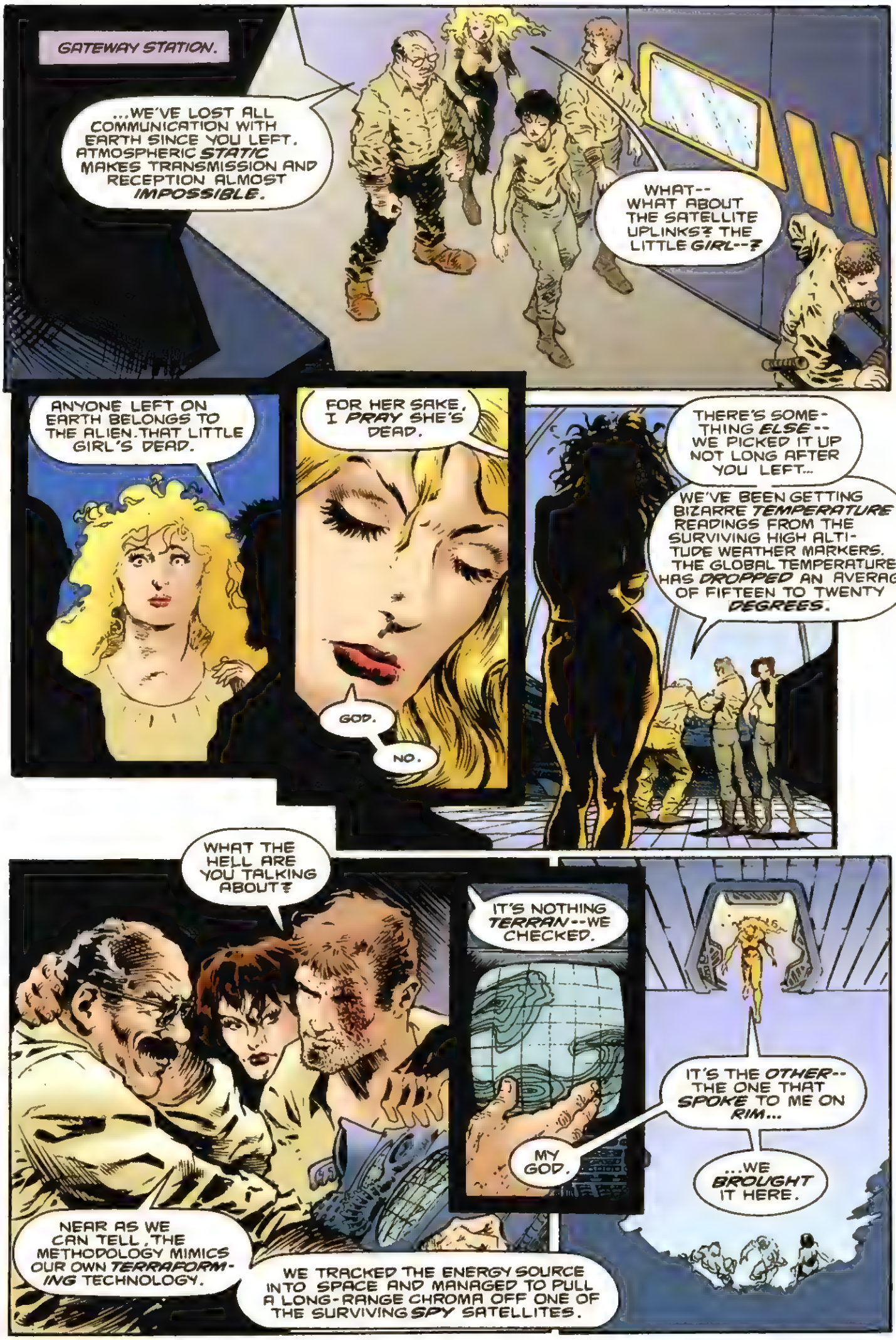
"...YOU'RE WITH *ME* NOW."

IT'S COLD.
SO COLD.
WE'VE BEEN ON THE RUN FOR WEEKS--
--THE EARTH WE KNEW IS GONE. THE ALIENS HAVE TAKEN IT AS THEIR OWN.
POWER TO THE SATELLITE UPLINKS WENT OUT WHEN THE CREATURES FINALLY SEVERED THE MAIN UNDERGROUNDS. THERE WOULD BE NO MORE TRANSMISSIONS."
CHARLIE CHEESE PIZZA
I--I USED TO COME HERE WHEN I WAS A KID.
THERE WERE MORE SOPHISTICATED ATTRACTIONS DOWN BY THE SHORE--THREE-DIMENSIONAL STUFF, INFRA-LIGHT, GRAVITY CHAMBERS--BUT I WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE MACHINES.
FOR SOME REASON WE DON'T FEEL THE CREATURES LIKE THE OTHERS. WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO RESIST HER MENTAL LURE...
I DIDN'T KNOW WHY BACK THEN, BUT NOW I THINK I UNDERSTAND. THEY NEVER KNEW PAIN, THE FEAR OF DEATH--
--AND IF YOU NEVER LIVE, YOU CAN NEVER DIE. THERE'S A KIND OF IMMORTALITY IN THAT.
THAT'S ENOUGH, PAUL.
YOU--YOU USED TO PLAY HERE?
...WHILE SHE USES THE OTHERS TO BREED HER CHILDREN.
AMY'S ALL I HAVE LEFT.
SHOW ME. SHOW ME WHAT IT WAS LIKE.
I WANT HER TO KNOW SOMETHING GOOD, SOMETHING DECENT, BEFORE SHE DIES.
BEFORE WE ALL DIE.
PRETEND FOR ME.
THAT SHOULD BE EASY.
WE'VE BEEN PRETENDING FOR MONTHS--PRETENDING THERE'S A CHANCE, PRETENDING THERE'S A REASON TO--
--GO ON.

AMY--!
NOT THIS TIME, YOU SON OF A BITCH!
NOT YET--!
CRAAAK!
PAUL-- GET HER AWAY FROM HERE!
DADDY--!

KRUMPHH!
COME ON, AMY-- WE'VE GOT TO FIND COVER!
WE'VE GOT TO--
WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
--MMPPHHH!
SHE'S BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
AMY--!
CRUMPH!
JESUS--
AMY-- WHERE ARE YOU? WH--
NO--!
OH, GOD...
AMY.


OUR JOURNEY BACK TO EARTH HAD AN EERIE STILLNESS TO IT. HOW DID OLD-TIME SAILORS PUT IT--? "THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM."
GATEWAY STATION WAS LIKE A JEWEL SUSPENDED OVER THE BLUE CURVE OF EARTH. STRIPPED OF CONTEXT, IT GLITTERED WITH RARE BEAUTY.
WE HAD STOLEN THE ALIEN'S QUEEN MOTHER -- AND WE WOULD USE HER TO GATHER, THEN DESTROY, HER CHILDREN ON EARTH.
RIPLEY, WE'RE ALMOST SET TO DOCK.
I KNOW, BILLIE. COME IN.
RIPLEY SPENT HOURS ON THE SECURITY DECK, WATCHING HER. JUST... WATCHING.
I FOUND MY PEACE IN THE SOULLESS EMPTINESS OF SPACE.
RIPLEY FOUND HERS IN THE PITILESS CONFINES OF THE ALIEN QUEEN'S POD.
I'VE BEEN STUDYING IT. THE WAY IT MOVES. THE WAY IT THINKS.
IT KNOWS.
IT-- SHE-- KNOWS EVERYTHING.
I THOUGHT THAT BY SURROUNDING HER WITH THE HIDES OF HER DEAD, SHE WOULD WITHDRAW INTO THE SANCTITY OF THE POD. BUT THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL.
CHRIST, BILLIE-- SHE KNOWS.
AND SHE DOESN'T CARE.

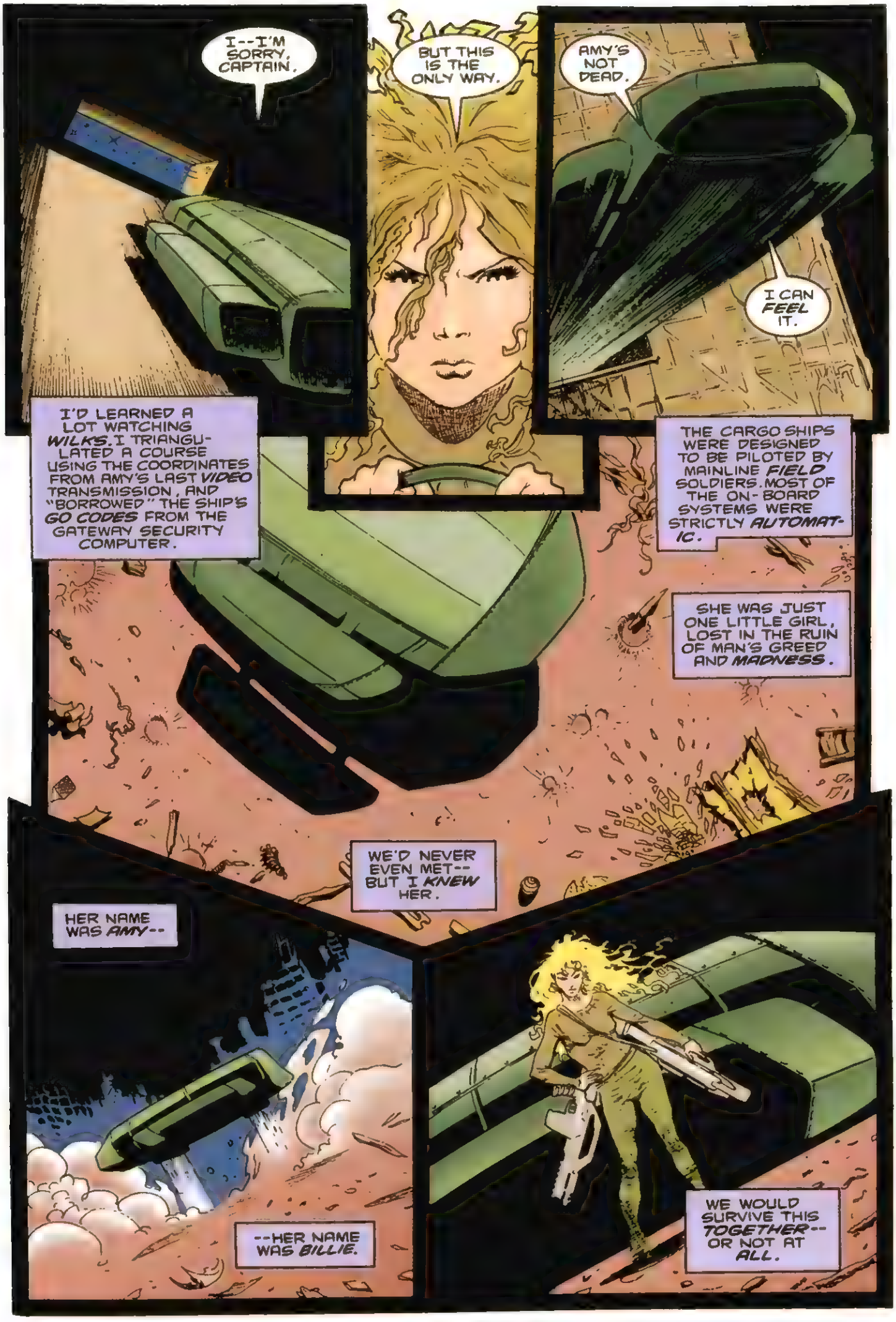

GATEWAY STATION.
...WE'VE LOST ALL COMMUNICATION WITH EARTH SINCE YOU LEFT. ATMOSPHERIC STATIC MAKES TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.
WHAT-- WHAT ABOUT THE SATELLITE UPLINKS? THE LITTLE GIRL--?
ANYONE LEFT ON EARTH BELONGS TO THE ALIEN. THAT LITTLE GIRL'S DEAD.
FOR HER SAKE, I PRAY SHE'S DEAD.
GOD.
NO.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE-- WE PICKED IT UP NOT LONG AFTER YOU LEFT...
WE'VE BEEN GETTING BIZARRE TEMPERATURE READINGS FROM THE SURVIVING HIGH ALTITUDE WEATHER MARKERS. THE GLOBAL TEMPERATURE HAS DROPPED AN AVERAGE OF FIFTEEN TO TWENTY DEGREES.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IT'S NOTHING TERRAN--WE CHECKED.
MY GOD.
IT'S THE OTHER-- THE ONE THAT SPOKE TO ME ON RIM...
...WE BROUGHT IT HERE.
NEAR AS WE CAN TELL, THE METHODOLOGY MIMICS OUR OWN TERRAFORMING TECHNOLOGY.
WE TRACKED THE ENERGY SOURCE INTO SPACE AND MANAGED TO PULL A LONG-RANGE CHROMA OFF ONE OF THE SURVIVING SPY SATELLITES.

ITS COMPANION DIED ON ACHERON, LONG BEFORE THE NOSTROMO--LONG BEFORE ANY OF IT. IT FOLLOWED US AS WE SEARCHED FOR THE ALIEN'S HOME, THEN IT RETURNED WITH US TO EARTH.
WE THOUGHT IT SHARED OUR HATRED OF THE ALIEN--
--BUT IT WANTED EARTH, NOT REVENGE.
WE'RE WASTING TIME, DAMMIT-- IT DOESN'T MATTER. NOTHING MATTERS EXCEPT THOSE THINGS.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, RIPLEY? THAT CREATURE-- WHATEVER THE HELL IT IS-- IS EMPLOYING TERRAFORMING TECHNOLOGY. THERE WON'T BE ANY EARTH LEFT IF WE DON'T--
YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?
THIS ISN'T ABOUT EARTH.
THIS IS FOR ME. ONCE THOSE CREATURES ARE DEAD-- I'M THROUGH WITH IT.
I SEE--IT'S EASIER WHEN YOU JUST DON'T GIVE A SHIT.
THE MILITARY, THE CORPORATION--THEY BROUGHT THE ALIEN TO EARTH FOR A REASON. THEY TRIED TO BUY ME THE SAME WAY.
I OWE THE ALIEN SOME PAYBACK, BUT I DON'T OWE YOUR EARTH A GODDAMN THING. WE'RE GOING TO FINISH THIS--NOW.
GREAT-- FIRST WE GRAVITY-DRIVE ACROSS THE GALAXY TO PLAY TAXICAB WITH SOME ALIEN THING, AND NOW WE'RE ORDERED BACK TO EARTH.
I'LL GO ALONG FOR THE RIDE, BUT I'M TELLING YOU--IF RIPLEY TRIES TO PULL ANOTHER GUN ON ME, THERE'S GOING TO BE TROUBLE.
YEAH--THIS TIME SHE MIGHT ACTUALLY SHOOT.

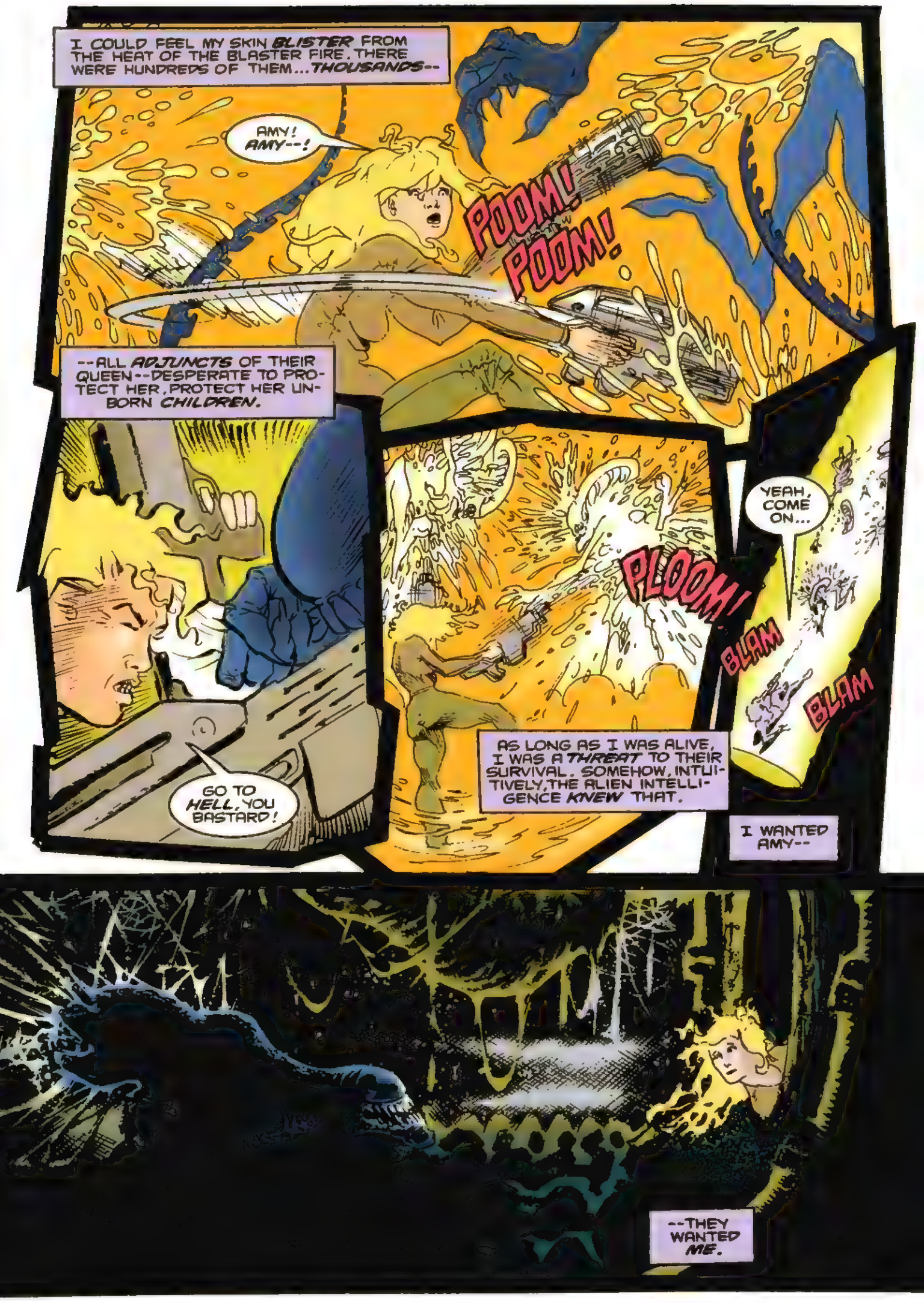
RIPLEY AND WILKS LED THE OTHERS TO THE SHIP, READYING THEMSELVES FOR THEIR FINAL STRUGGLE. THE FLAME OF HATRED BURNED *BRIGHT* IN RIPLEY'S EYES.
THERE'S NO REASON FOR YOU TO COME, BILLIE. YOU'LL BE *SAFE* HERE.
I *KNOW*.
I'D SEEN IT SO MANY TIMES BEFORE. IN WILKS. IN GENERAL SPEARS. IN *MYSELF*.
I WATCHED THEM DISAPPEAR BEHIND THE COLD STEEL OF THE AIRLOCK-- DISAPPEAR INTO RIPLEY'S *OBSESSION*--
--ALL THE TIME *KNOWING* WHAT I WOULD HAVE TO DO.
ORONA'S BOMBS WERE PART OF AN OLD-STYLE MILITARY *ARSENAL*, LOCATED IN A REMOTE MOUNTAINSIDE BUNKER. THAT WAS RIPLEY'S *TARGET*.
THE ALIEN QUEEN MOTHER WOULD GATHER HER FLOCK FOR NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON. THOSE NOT KILLED BY THE INITIAL BLAST WOULD BE LEFT WITHOUT ANY *FUNCTION*.
I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH *TIME*.

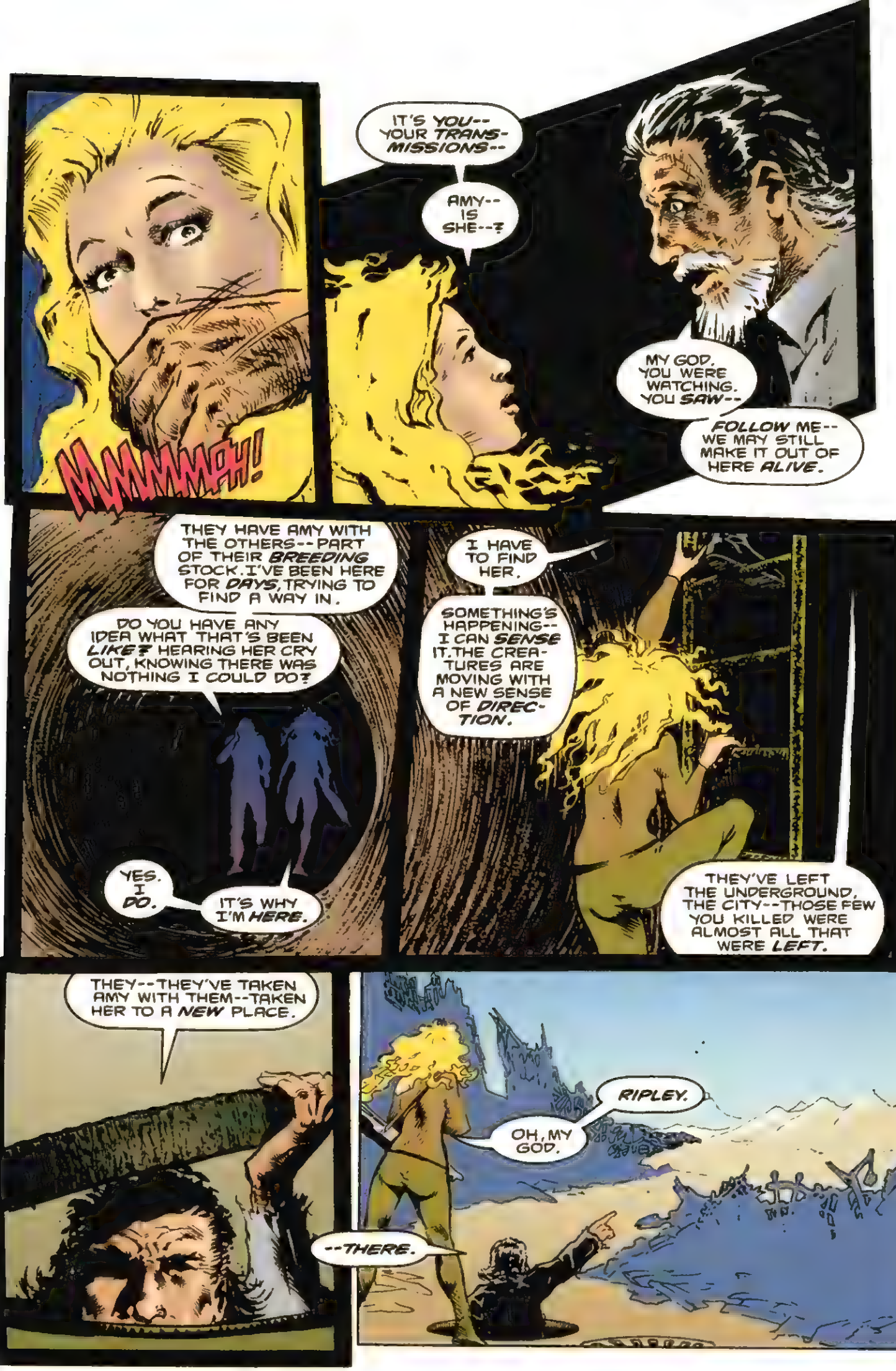
--AND YET, IN A REAL WAY, SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO WOULD TRULY UNDERSTAND WHAT I WAS ABOUT TO DO.
LOOKS LIKE THE MILITARY BOMB SPECIALISTS WERE IN QUITE A HURRY TO GET IN.
YOUR DR. ORONA HAD THEM WIRE THE NUKES INTO A SEQUENTIAL DETONATION PATTERN JUST PRIOR TO EVACUATION.
GOD ONLY KNOWS WHY THEY DIDN'T BLOW THE FIRST TIME.
GOD ONLY KNOWS.
MAYBE THE SEQUENCE WAS INTERRUPTED BY SOME NATURAL PHENOMENON. THESE WEAPONS WERE NEVER MEANT TO WITHSTAND EXPOSURE TO THE ELEMENTS--
--THERE'S ENOUGH FIREPOWER HERE TO LEVEL THE CONTINENT, BUT THE BOMBS THEMSELVES ARE FRAGILE AS DUST.
RIPLEY--WILKS!
DOWN HERE!
I THINK I FIGURED OUT WHY THE BOMBS NEVER DETONATED--

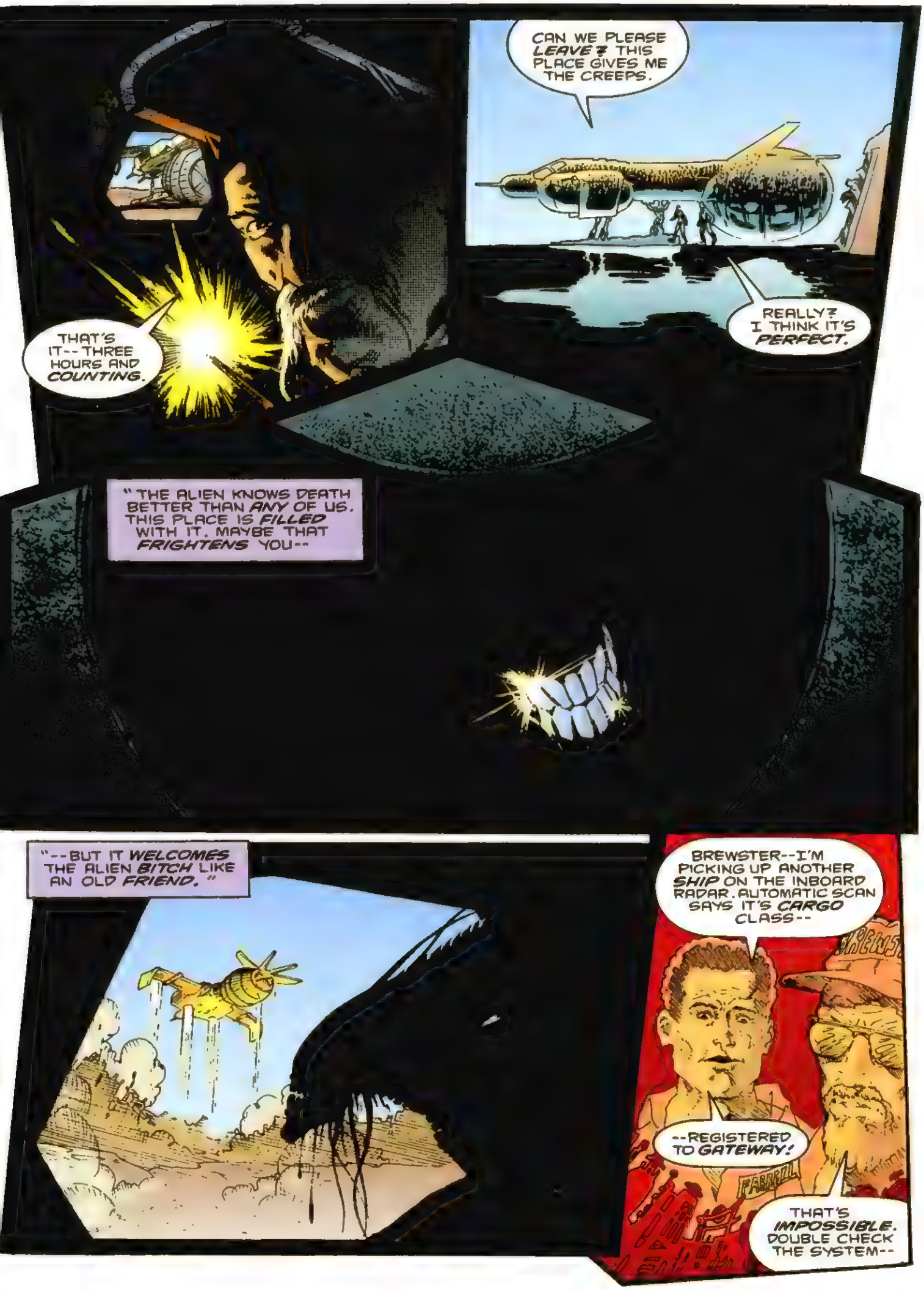
--AND IT'S MORE THAN CORROSION. SOMEBODY DECIDED TO PUT A STOP TO THIS COUNTDOWN PERMANENTLY.
WHAT THE HELL DID THIS? DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ANY KIND OF CONVENTIONAL BURN.
I DON'T LIKE THIS-- I DON'T LIKE IT ONE BIT.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE IT, TULLY-- JUST FIX IT.
RADIO THE DROP SHIP. THIS PROJECT'S A GO.
--ZZZZZZ--THEY'VE LOCALIZED THE PROBLEM AND--ZZZZ--REWIRING A SECOND DETONATOR--NO SIGN OF INFESTATION, BUT--ZZZZZZ--STAND BY JUST IN CASE--
YOUR SIGNAL'S BREAKING UP, BREWSTER --ENERGY FIELD'S PLAYING HELL WITH COMMUNICATIONS--
--CONTINUE WITH TEN-MINUTE UPDATES AND CONTINUOUS MOTION SWEEPS. YOU PICK UP MOVEMENT, GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE.
WHAT THE--?
SIR, DID YOU AUTHORIZE A LOWER DECK LAUNCH SEQUENCE?
WHAT?
SOMEONE'S BROKEN INTO ONE OF THE LOADER BAYS. JESUS--THEY'RE LAUNCHING ONE OF THE CARGO SHIPS!
GET ME AN OPEN LINE INTO THAT VESSEL!
THIS IS CAPTAIN MCQUADE. IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

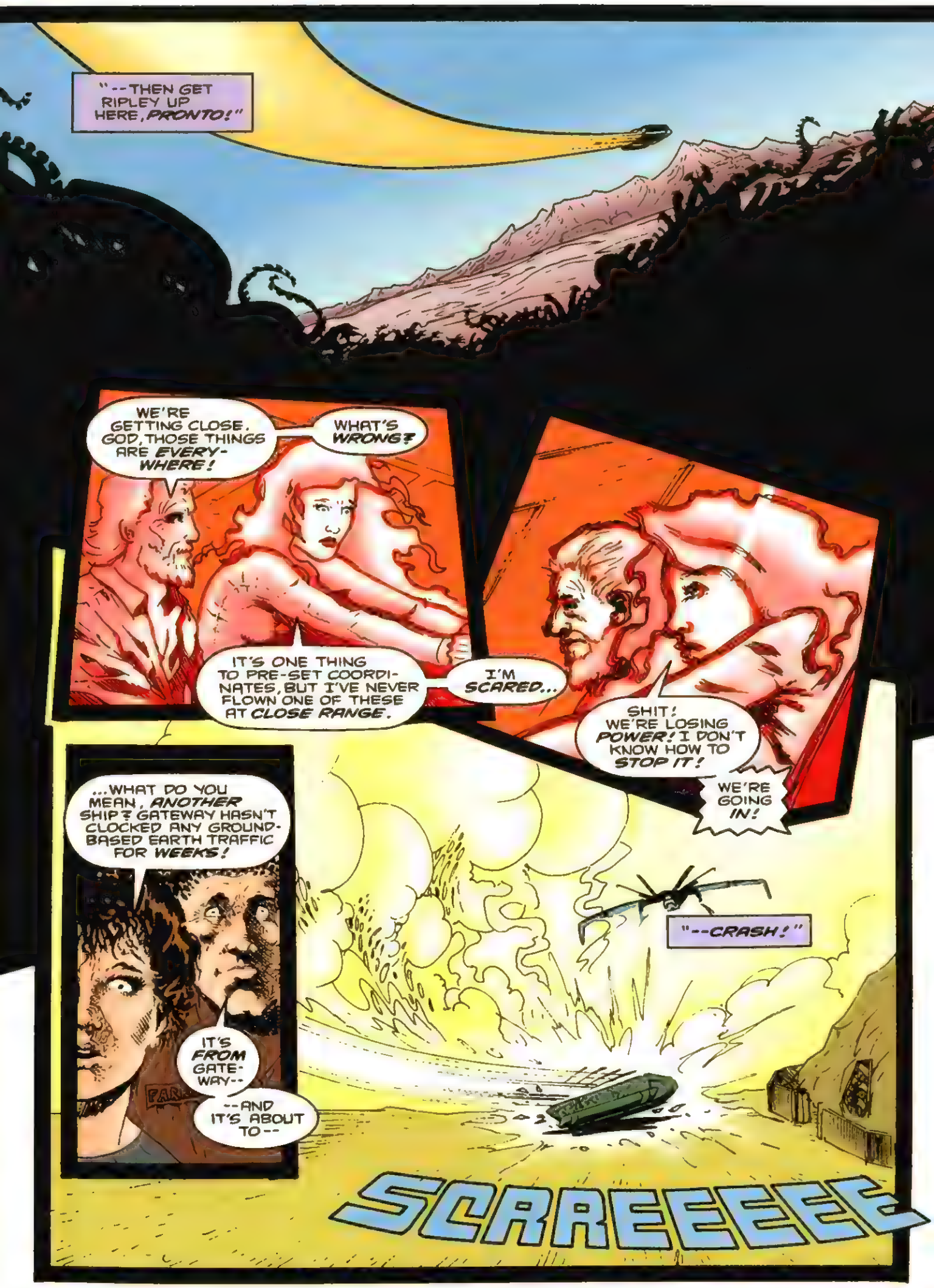

I--I'M SORRY, CAPTAIN.
BUT THIS IS THE ONLY WAY.
AMY'S NOT DEAD.
I CAN FEEL IT.
I'D LEARNED A LOT WATCHING WILKS. I TRIANGULATED A COURSE USING THE COORDINATES FROM AMY'S LAST VIDEO TRANSMISSION, AND "BORROWED" THE SHIP'S GO CODES FROM THE GATEWAY SECURITY COMPUTER.
THE CARGO SHIPS WERE DESIGNED TO BE PILOTED BY MAINLINE FIELD SOLDIERS. MOST OF THE ON-BOARD SYSTEMS WERE STRICTLY AUTOMATIC.
SHE WAS JUST ONE LITTLE GIRL, LOST IN THE RUIN OF MAN'S GREED AND MADNESS.
WE'D NEVER EVEN MET-- BUT I KNEW HER.
HER NAME WAS AMY--
--HER NAME WAS BILLIE.
WE WOULD SURVIVE THIS TOGETHER-- OR NOT AT ALL.

I WASN'T SURE WHERE TO BEGIN-- AND THEN I HEARD THE SCREAMS. JUST LIKE BEFORE--LIKE RIM. LIKE ALL THE REST...
THE SOUND WAS CLOSE, REVERBERATING BENEATH THE BROKEN STREETS.
EACH TIME I ESCAPED THE ALIEN, IT SEEMED TO BRING ME BACK. I BEGAN TO REALIZE THIS WAS MORE THAN CAPRICIOUS FATE OR CHANCE--
THE TERRIBLE SCREAMS GREW LOUDER, AND I WANTED TO JOIN THEM--
--ADD MY VOICE TO THE RISING HOWL OF PAIN AND HORROR.
OH, MY GOD--
--IT WAS DESIGN. IT WAS MEANT TO BE.
NOOOO---!
BA-BLAM!
BA-BLAM!
BA-BLAM!
BA-BLAM!
JESUS, GOD-- I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE.

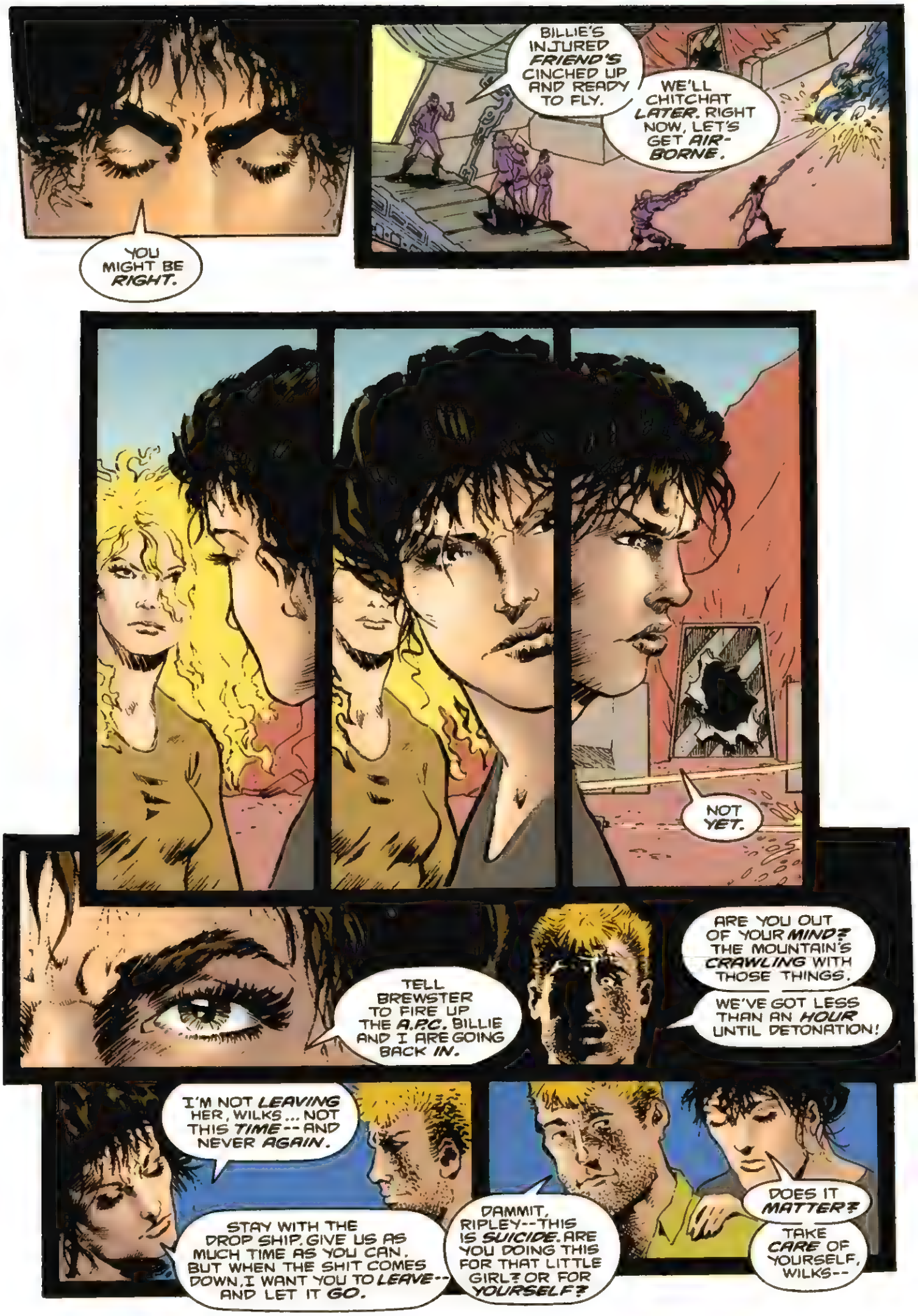

I COULD FEEL MY SKIN BLISTER FROM THE HEAT OF THE BLASTER FIRE. THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF THEM...THOUSANDS--
AMY! AMY--!
POOM! POOM!
--ALL ADJUNCTS OF THEIR QUEEN--DESPERATE TO PROTECT HER, PROTECT HER UNBORN CHILDREN.
GO TO HELL, YOU BASTARD!
PLOOM!
YEAH, COME ON...
BLAM
BLAM
AS LONG AS I WAS ALIVE, I WAS A THREAT TO THEIR SURVIVAL. SOMEHOW, INTUITIVELY, THE ALIEN INTELLIGENCE KNEW THAT.
I WANTED AMY--
--THEY WANTED ME.


MMMMPH!
IT'S YOU-- YOUR TRANS-MISSIONS--
AMY-- IS SHE--?
MY GOD. YOU WERE WATCHING. YOU SAW--
FOLLOW ME-- WE MAY STILL MAKE IT OUT OF HERE ALIVE.
THEY HAVE AMY WITH THE OTHERS--PART OF THEIR BREEDING STOCK. I'VE BEEN HERE FOR DAYS, TRYING TO FIND A WAY IN.
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THAT'S BEEN LIKE? HEARING HER CRY OUT, KNOWING THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO?
YES. I DO.
IT'S WHY I'M HERE.
I HAVE TO FIND HER.
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING-- I CAN SENSE IT. THE CREA-TURES ARE MOVING WITH A NEW SENSE OF DIREC-TION.
THEY'VE LEFT THE UNDERGROUND, THE CITY--THOSE FEW YOU KILLED WERE ALMOST ALL THAT WERE LEFT.
THEY--THEY'VE TAKEN AMY WITH THEM--TAKEN HER TO A NEW PLACE.
RIPLEY.
OH, MY GOD.
--THERE.


CAN WE PLEASE LEAVE? THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS.
REALLY? I THINK IT'S PERFECT.
THAT'S IT--THREE HOURS AND COUNTING.
"THE ALIEN KNOWS DEATH BETTER THAN ANY OF US. THIS PLACE IS FILLED WITH IT. MAYBE THAT FRIGHTENS YOU--
"--BUT IT WELCOMES THE ALIEN BITCH LIKE AN OLD FRIEND."
BREWSTER--I'M PICKING UP ANOTHER SHIP ON THE INBOARD RADAR. AUTOMATIC SCAN SAYS IT'S CARGO CLASS--
--REGISTERED TO GATEWAY!
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. DOUBLE CHECK THE SYSTEM--


"--THEN GET RIPLEY UP HERE, PRONTO!"
WE'RE GETTING CLOSE. GOD, THOSE THINGS ARE EVERY-WHERE!
WHAT'S WRONG?
IT'S ONE THING TO PRE-SET COORDI-NATES, BUT I'VE NEVER FLOWN ONE OF THESE AT CLOSE RANGE.
I'M SCARED...
SHIT! WE'RE LOSING POWER! I DON'T KNOW HOW TO STOP IT!
WE'RE GOING IN!
...WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ANOTHER SHIP? GATEWAY HASN'T CLOCKED ANY GROUND-BASED EARTH TRAFFIC FOR WEEKS!
IT'S FROM GATE-WAY--
--AND IT'S ABOUT TO--
"--CRASH!"
SCRREEEEEE

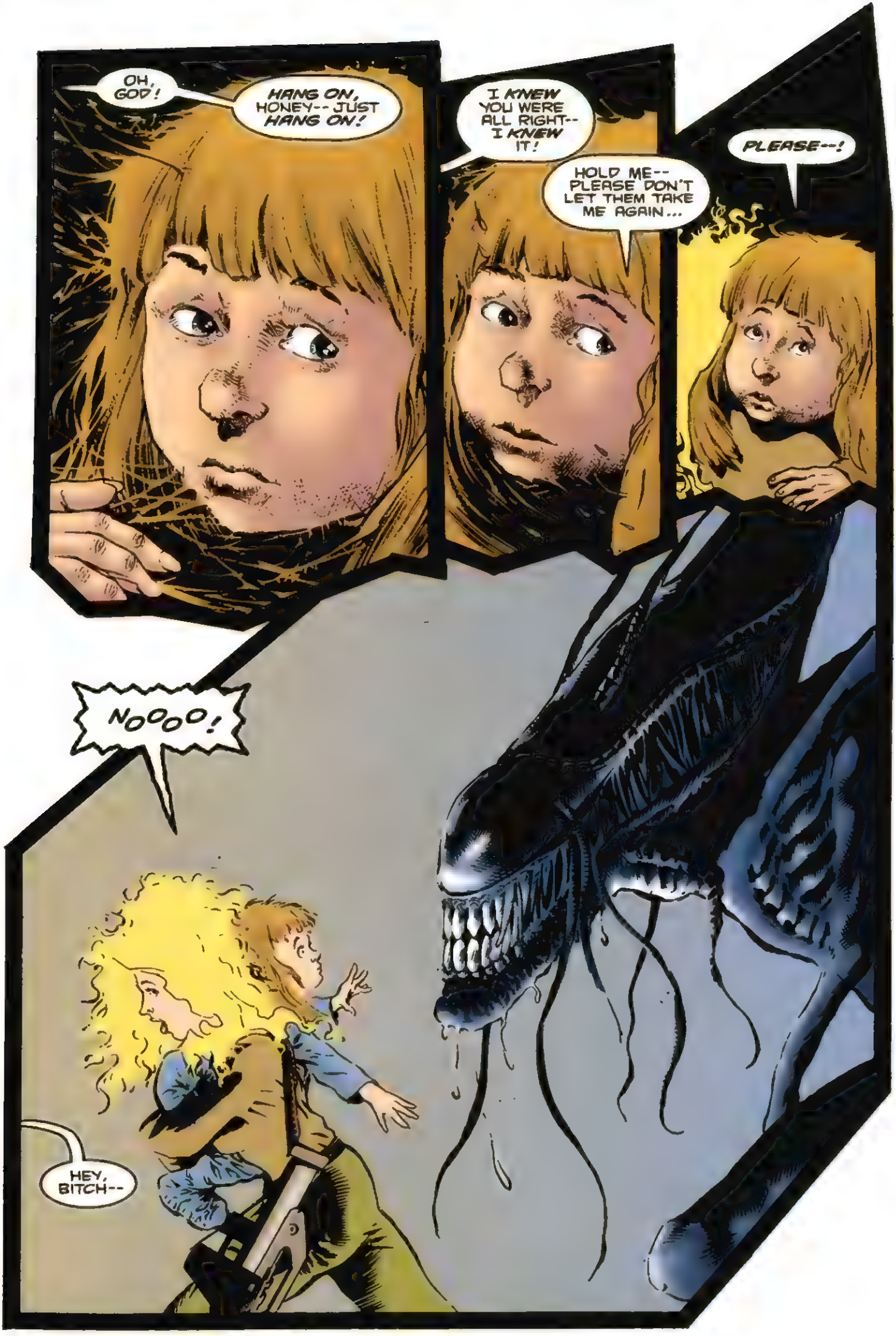
NNGHHHH--
HAVE TO-- HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM THE SHIP.
CHRIST-- I'M SORRY-- I'M SO SORRY...
YOU SHOULD BE.
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING BY COMING HERE? YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE RISKING JUST BY LANDING? THE MOUNTAIN'S ALIVE WITH THOSE ALIEN THINGS--AND THE BOMBS HAVE BEEN ARMED.
YOUR PASSENGER'S UNCONSCIOUS, BUT HE'LL SURVIVE.
AMY'S FATHER-- IS HE--?
IS THAT WHAT THIS WAS ABOUT? DAMMIT, BILLIE--THE LITTLE GIRL'S DEAD.
NO-- THEY'VE TAKEN HER WITH THEM--
--MAYBE YOU CAN LEAVE WITHOUT HER, BUT I CAN'T.
SHE HAD RISKED EVERYTHING TO PULL ME FROM THE WRECKAGE OF THE CARGO SHIP.
T-MINUS ONE HOUR AND COUNTING, SURROUNDED BY THESE GODDAMN THINGS--
--I THINK SOMEONE'S TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING!


YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT.
BILLIE'S INJURED FRIEND'S CINCHED UP AND READY TO FLY.
WE'LL CHITCHAT LATER. RIGHT NOW, LET'S GET AIR-BORNE.
NOT YET.
TELL BREWSTER TO FIRE UP THE A.P.C. BILLIE AND I ARE GOING BACK IN.
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? THE MOUNTAIN'S CRAWLING WITH THOSE THINGS.
WE'VE GOT LESS THAN AN HOUR UNTIL DETONATION!
I'M NOT LEAVING HER, WILKS... NOT THIS TIME -- AND NEVER AGAIN.
STAY WITH THE DROP SHIP. GIVE US AS MUCH TIME AS YOU CAN. BUT WHEN THE SHIT COMES DOWN, I WANT YOU TO LEAVE -- AND LET IT GO.
DAMMIT, RIPLEY -- THIS IS SUICIDE. ARE YOU DOING THIS FOR THAT LITTLE GIRL? OR FOR YOURSELF?
DOES IT MATTER?
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, WILKS --

"--NOW GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE."
RIPLEY HAD SPENT YEARS TRYING TO FORGET ALL SHE HAD LEFT BEHIND. MORE THAN FAMILY AND CAREER--
--SHE'D LOST HER SELF-RESPECT. HER DIGNITY.
CHUNK!
I KNEW WHAT WILKS WAS THINKING, BUT HE WAS WRONG. THIS WASN'T SUICIDE. RIPLEY AND I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE--
--WE WERE TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO LIVE. MAYBE THE LITTLE GIRL COULD SHOW US.
HOLD ON, BILLIE--

--WE'RE GOING IN.
SON OF A BITCH!
WE'RE STARTING TO LOSE SYSTEM CONTROL. THE GODDAMN ACID MUST BE EATING THROUGH THE HYDRAULICS--
WHAT'S THAT MEAN--?
IT MEANS I'M LOSING HER-- I'M LOS--
ERRRKK

FOR A MOMENT, THERE WAS ONLY DARKNESS--
-- AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT.
RIPLEY BLEW THE EXPLOSIVE BOLTS ON THE SIDE HATCH AND CLIMBED OUT TO FACE HER DEMONS.
FIND HER, BILLIE-- JUST FIND HER.
I FOLLOWED CLOSE BEHIND, READY TO FACE MY OWN.
AMY--! AMY!
BLAM
TALK TO ME-- AMY--GOD, PLEASE!
BLAM
HELP ME...
AMY--!

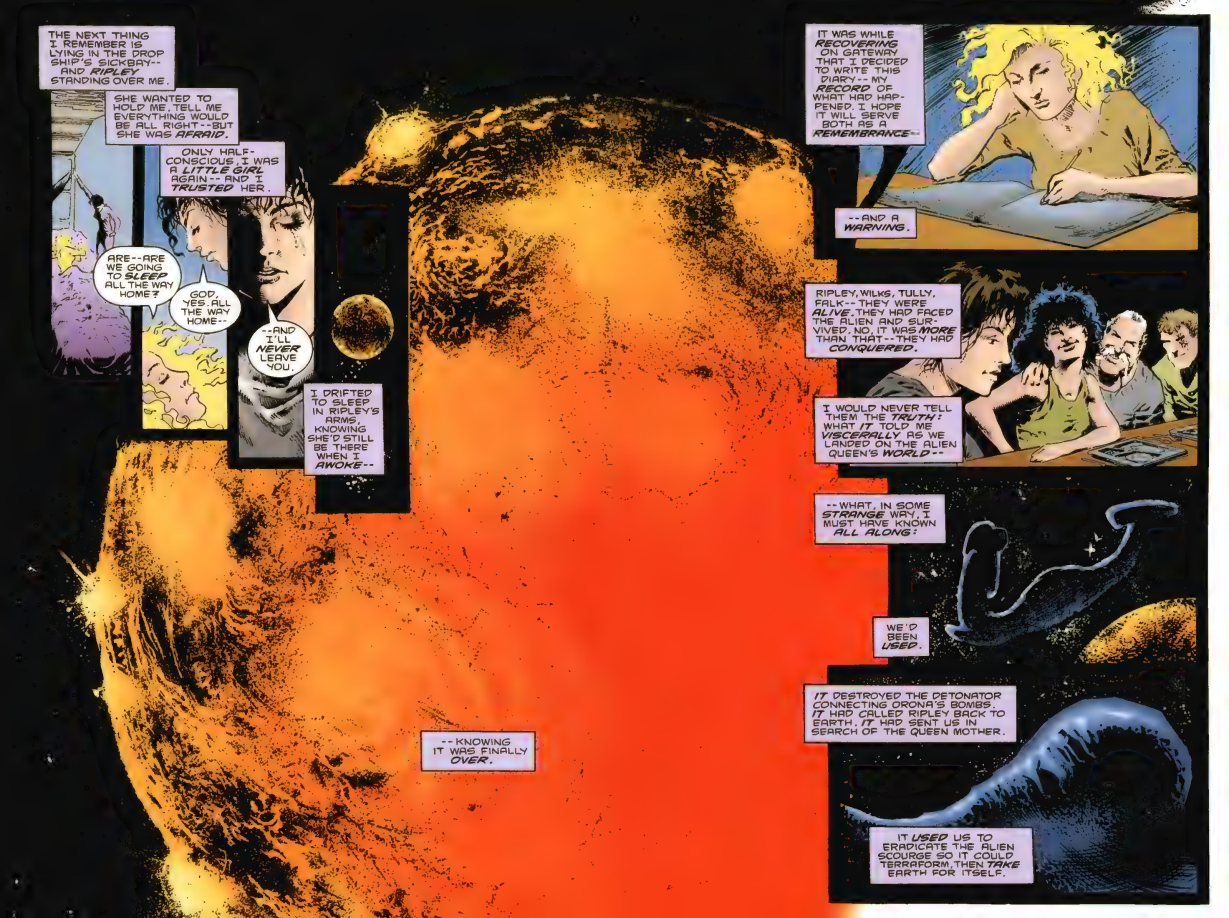

OH, GOD!
HANG ON, HONEY-- JUST HANG ON!
I KNEW YOU WERE ALL RIGHT-- I KNEW IT!
HOLD ME-- PLEASE DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME AGAIN...
PLEASE--!
NOOOO!
HEY, BITCH--

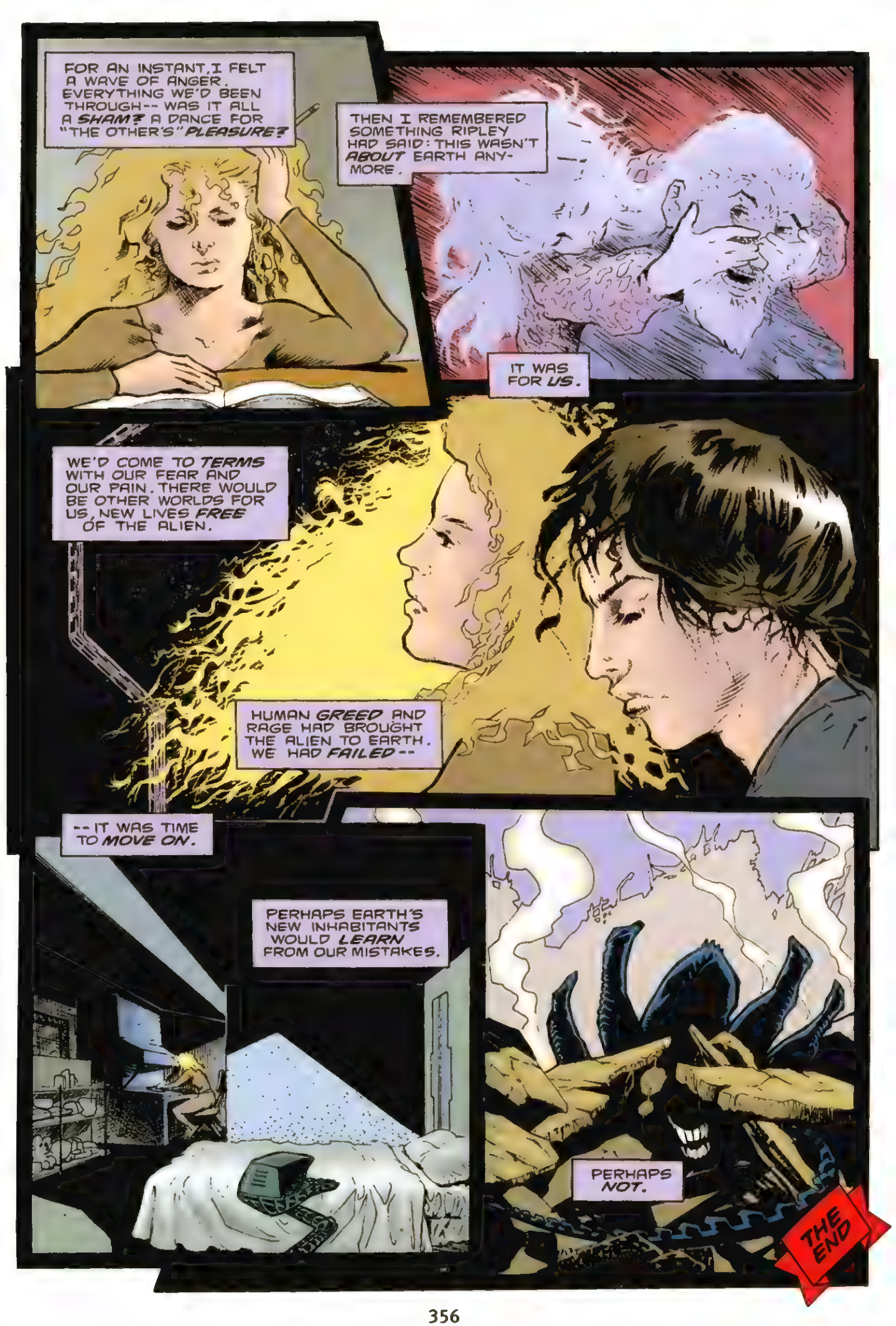
--IT'S ME YOU WANT.
BILLIE-- MOVE OVER HERE WITH ME.
THAT'S WHY YOU HAD YOUR BABIES KEEP THE LITTLE GIRL ALIVE-- YOU KNEW WE'D COME FOR HER.
GET HER BACK TO THE A.P.C. AND WAIT FOR ME.
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO FINISH.
FIFTEEN MINUTES AND THIS WHOLE MOUNTAIN'S GOING TO BE SO MUCH DUST-- BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT, IS IT? THIS IS WHAT'S IMPORTANT--
--YOU AND ME.
I THOUGHT I'D LET THE BOMBS FINISH YOU, BUT IT'S BETTER THIS WAY.
COME ON, TAKE A GOOD LOOK...

...IT'S THE LAST THING YOU'LL EVER SEE.
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
BUDDA BUDDA
DAMN IT, RIPLEY, WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?
TWELVE MINUTES AND COUNTING.
WE'RE EATING UP OUR SAFETY MARGIN BUT QUICK.
LAST TIME I TRIED TO PLAY IT SAFE, I ENDED UP WITH A PISTOL AGAINST MY HEAD--
--BUT THIS TIME THERE'S NO ROOM FOR DISPUTE. IF WE'RE NOT OUT OF HERE IN FIVE MINUTES, KISS YOUR ASS GOOD-BYE.

TWELVE MINUTES TO DETONATION-- WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT-SIDE.
BLAM
PLOOM
CHRIST, RIPLEY, THE A.P.C.'S TOTALLED--
--I DON'T THINK THEY'RE GOING TO LET US WALK OUT.
WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT WALKING?
GET INSIDE THE A.P.C.-- NOW.
WHAT THE HELL ARE WE DOING, RIPLEY?
IT WILL TAKE THOSE THINGS A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO SQUEEZE INSIDE. THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TIME.
THEY DESIGNED THIS ESCAPE POD FOR QUICK EXITS IN CASE OF INTERNAL CORE DAMAGE--
--IT'S SUPPOSED TO BLOW UP AND OUT--
--BUT WE'RE GOING TO CHANGE THE SPECIFICATIONS!
HOLD TIGHT--!

BLAM!
MY GOD-- IT LOOKS LIKE SOME SORT OF PROJECTILE-- OR ESCAPE POD!
TAKE 'ER DOWN-- NOW!
RIGHT, THAT'S IT. WE'RE OUT OF HERE. I'M SORRY, MAN, BUT--
WAIT A MINUTE-- WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?
I REMEMBER THE REST OF IT IN ISOLATED FRAGMENTS. WILKS SAID THE POD'S INTERNAL CHUTE SLOWED US DOWN, SOFTENING OUR IMPACT.
ALL I KNEW-- ALL I CARED-- WAS THAT AMY WAS SAFE.


THE NEXT THING I REMEMBER IS LYING IN THE DROP SHIP'S SICKBAY-- AND RIPLEY STANDING OVER ME.
SHE WANTED TO HOLD ME, TELL ME EVERYTHING WOULD BE ALL RIGHT--BUT SHE WAS AFRAID.
ONLY HALF-CONSCIOUS, I WAS A LITTLE GIRL AGAIN -- AND I TRUSTED HER.
ARE--ARE WE GOING TO SLEEP ALL THE WAY HOME?
GOD, YES. ALL THE WAY HOME--
--AND I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU.
I DRIFTED TO SLEEP IN RIPLEY'S ARMS, KNOWING SHE'D STILL BE THERE WHEN I AWOKE--
--KNOWING IT WAS FINALLY OVER.
IT WAS WHILE RECOVERING ON GATEWAY THAT I DECIDED TO WRITE THIS DIARY -- MY RECORD OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED. I HOPE IT WILL SERVE BOTH AS A REMEMBRANCE--
--AND A WARNING.
RIPLEY, WILKS, TULLY, FALK -- THEY WERE ALIVE. THEY HAD FACED THE ALIEN AND SURVIVED. NO, IT WAS MORE THAN THAT -- THEY HAD CONQUERED.
I WOULD NEVER TELL THEM THE TRUTH: WHAT IT TOLD ME VISCERALLY AS WE LANDED ON THE ALIEN QUEEN'S WORLD--
--WHAT, IN SOME STRANGE WAY, I MUST HAVE KNOWN ALL ALONG:
WE'D BEEN USED.
IT DESTROYED THE DETONATOR CONNECTING ORONA'S BOMBS. IT HAD CALLED RIPLEY BACK TO EARTH. IT HAD SENT US IN SEARCH OF THE QUEEN MOTHER.
IT USED US TO ERADICATE THE ALIEN SCOURGE SO IT COULD TERRAFORM, THEN TAKE EARTH FOR ITSELF.


FOR AN INSTANT, I FELT A WAVE OF ANGER. EVERYTHING WE'D BEEN THROUGH -- WAS IT ALL A *SHAM?* A DANCE FOR "THE OTHER'S" *PLEASURE?*
THEN I REMEMBERED SOMETHING RIPLEY HAD SAID: THIS WASN'T *ABOUT* EARTH ANYMORE.
IT WAS FOR *US*.
WE'D COME TO *TERMS* WITH OUR FEAR AND OUR PAIN. THERE WOULD BE OTHER WORLDS FOR US, NEW LIVES *FREE* OF THE ALIEN.
HUMAN *GREED* AND RAGE HAD BROUGHT THE ALIEN TO EARTH. WE HAD *FAILED* --
-- IT WAS TIME TO *MOVE ON*.
PERHAPS EARTH'S NEW INHABITANTS WOULD *LEARN* FROM OUR MISTAKES.
PERHAPS *NOT*.
THE END

THEORY OF ALIEN PROPAGATION

script
MARK VERHEIDEN

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MARK A. NELSON

colors
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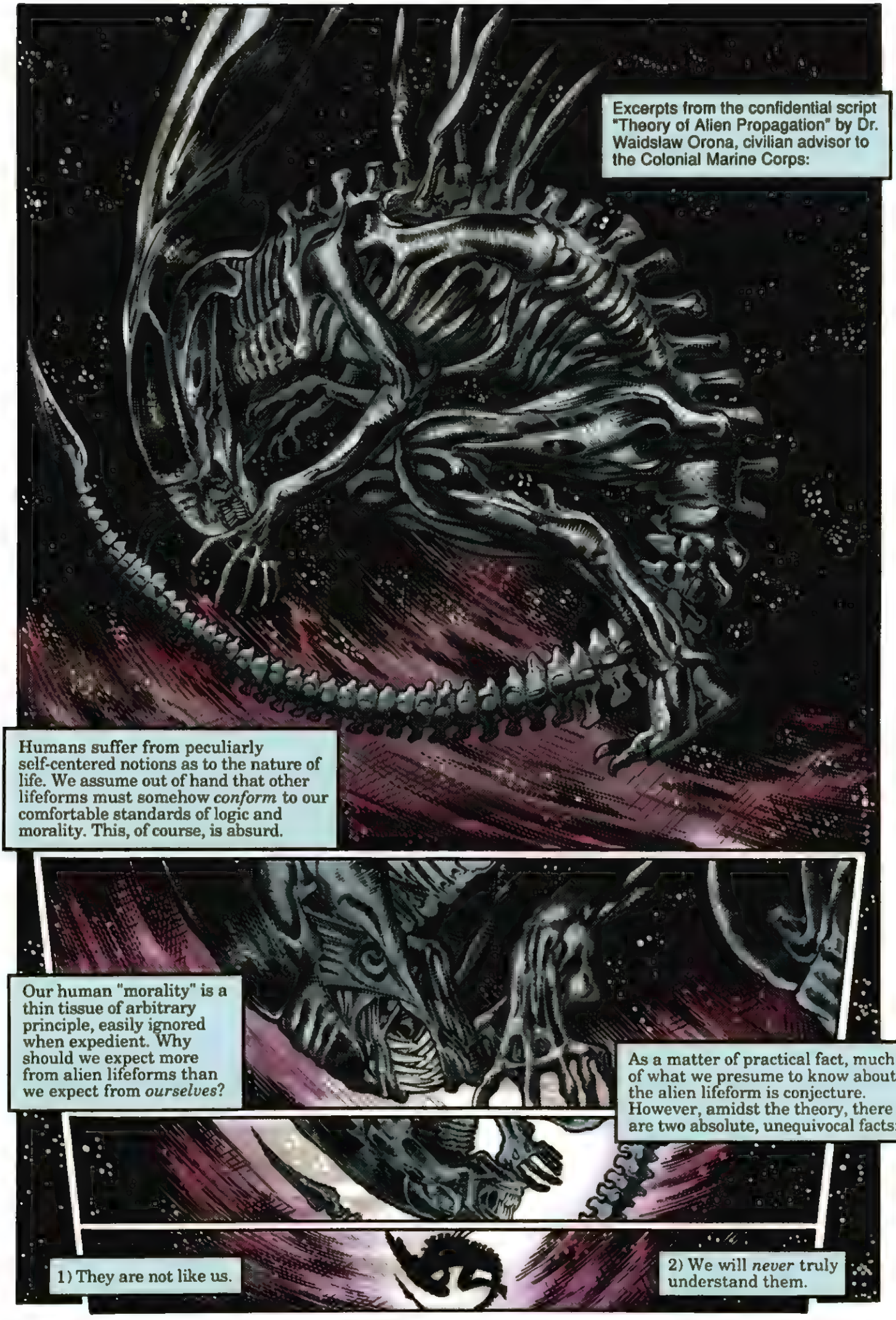
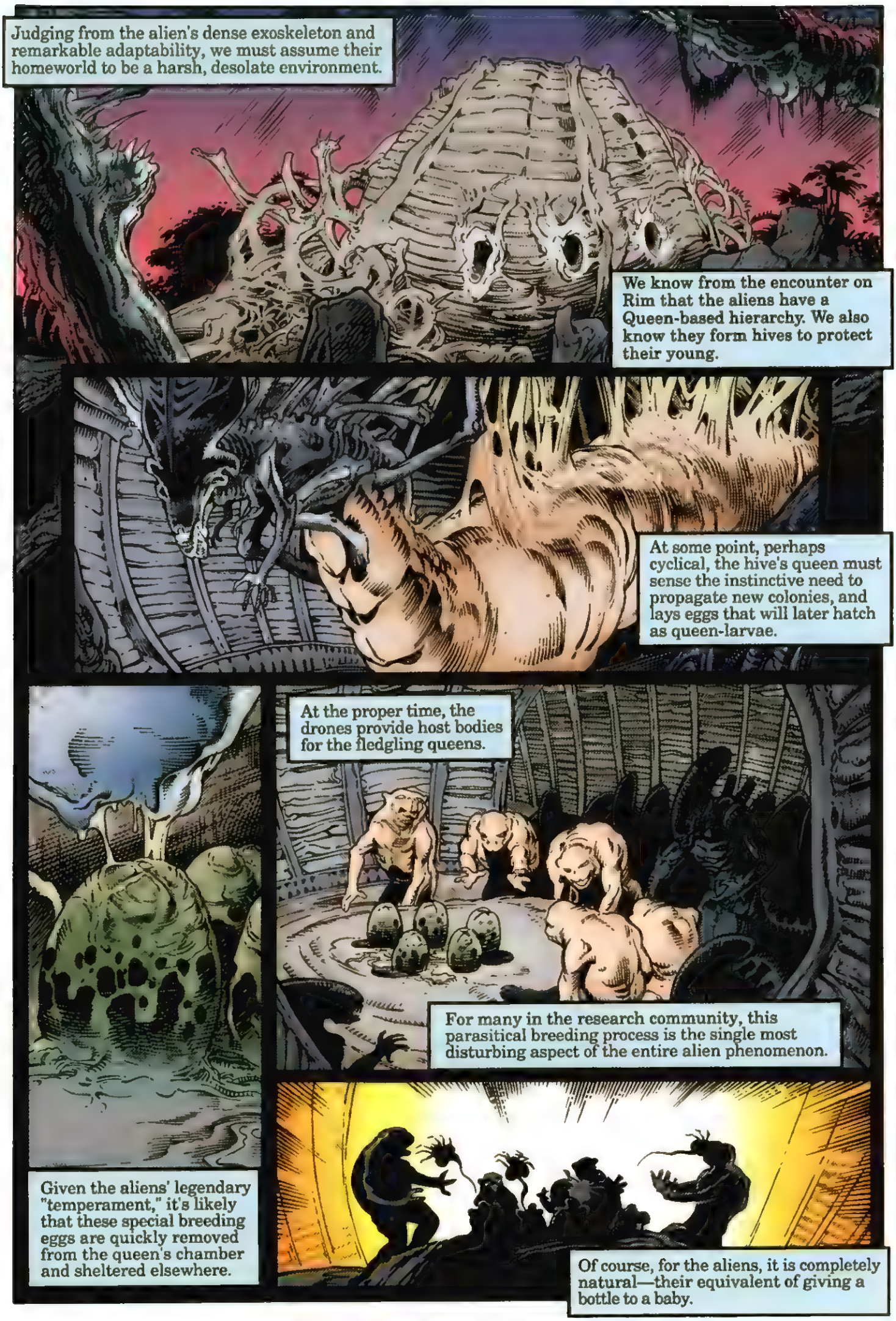
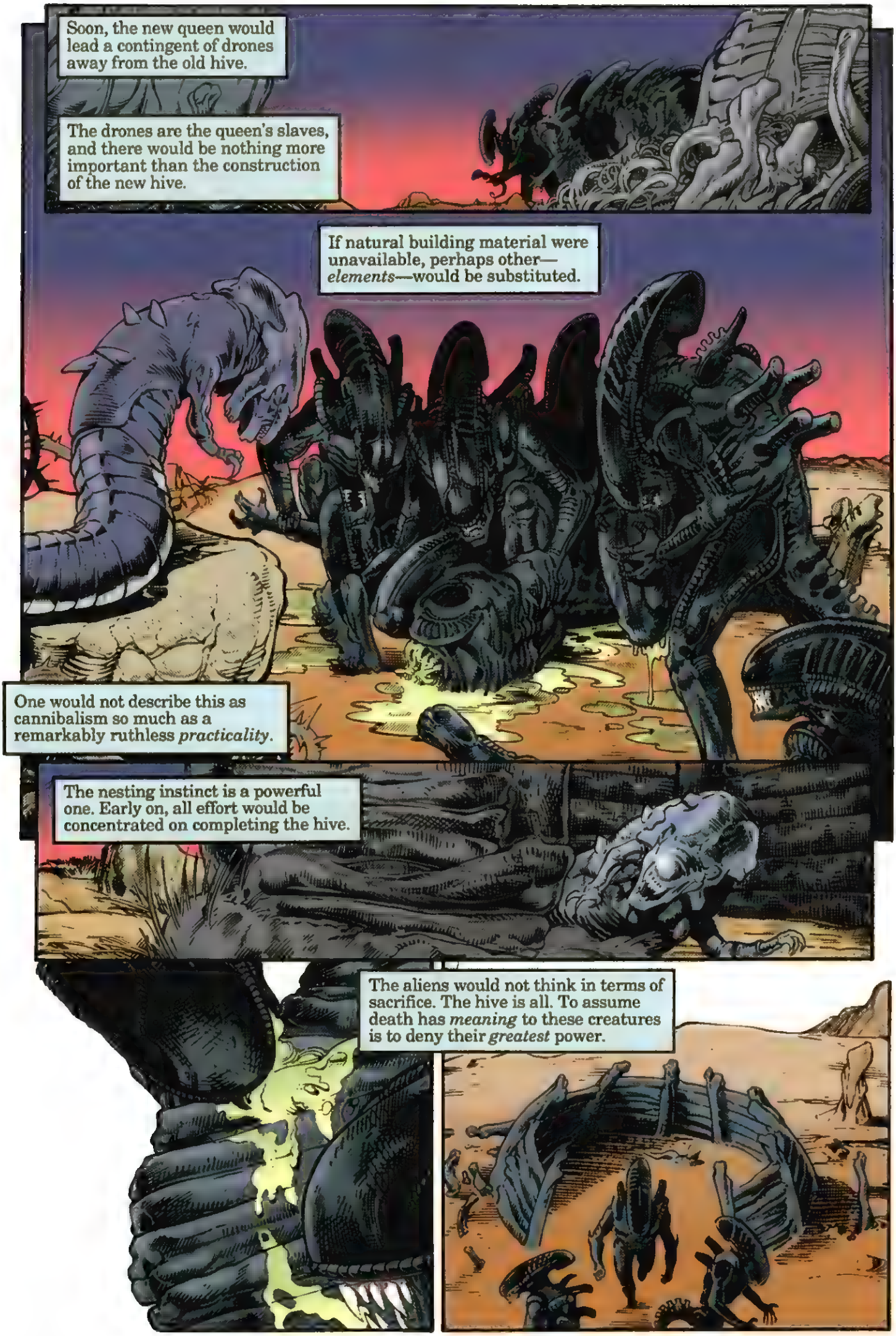
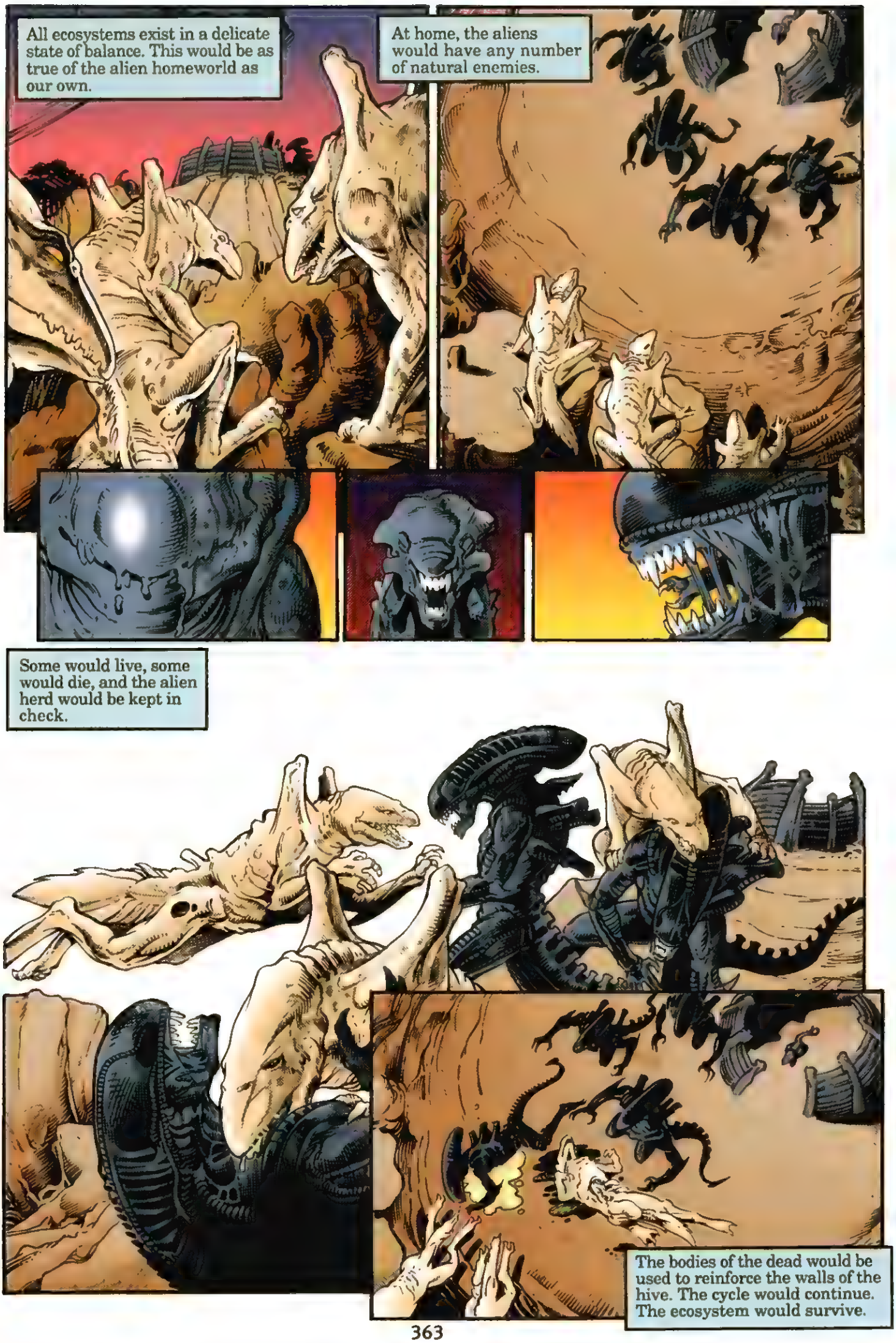
title illustration
JOHN BOLTON


Excerpts from the confidential script "Theory of Alien Propagation" by Dr. Waidslaw Orona, civilian advisor to the Colonial Marine Corps:
Humans suffer from peculiarly self-centered notions as to the nature of life. We assume out of hand that other lifeforms must somehow *conform* to our comfortable standards of logic and morality. This, of course, is absurd.
Our human "morality" is a thin tissue of arbitrary principle, easily ignored when expedient. Why should we expect more from alien lifeforms than we expect from *ourselves*?
As a matter of practical fact, much of what we presume to know about the alien lifeform is conjecture. However, amidst the theory, there are two absolute, unequivocal facts:
1) They are not like us.
2) We will *never* truly understand them.

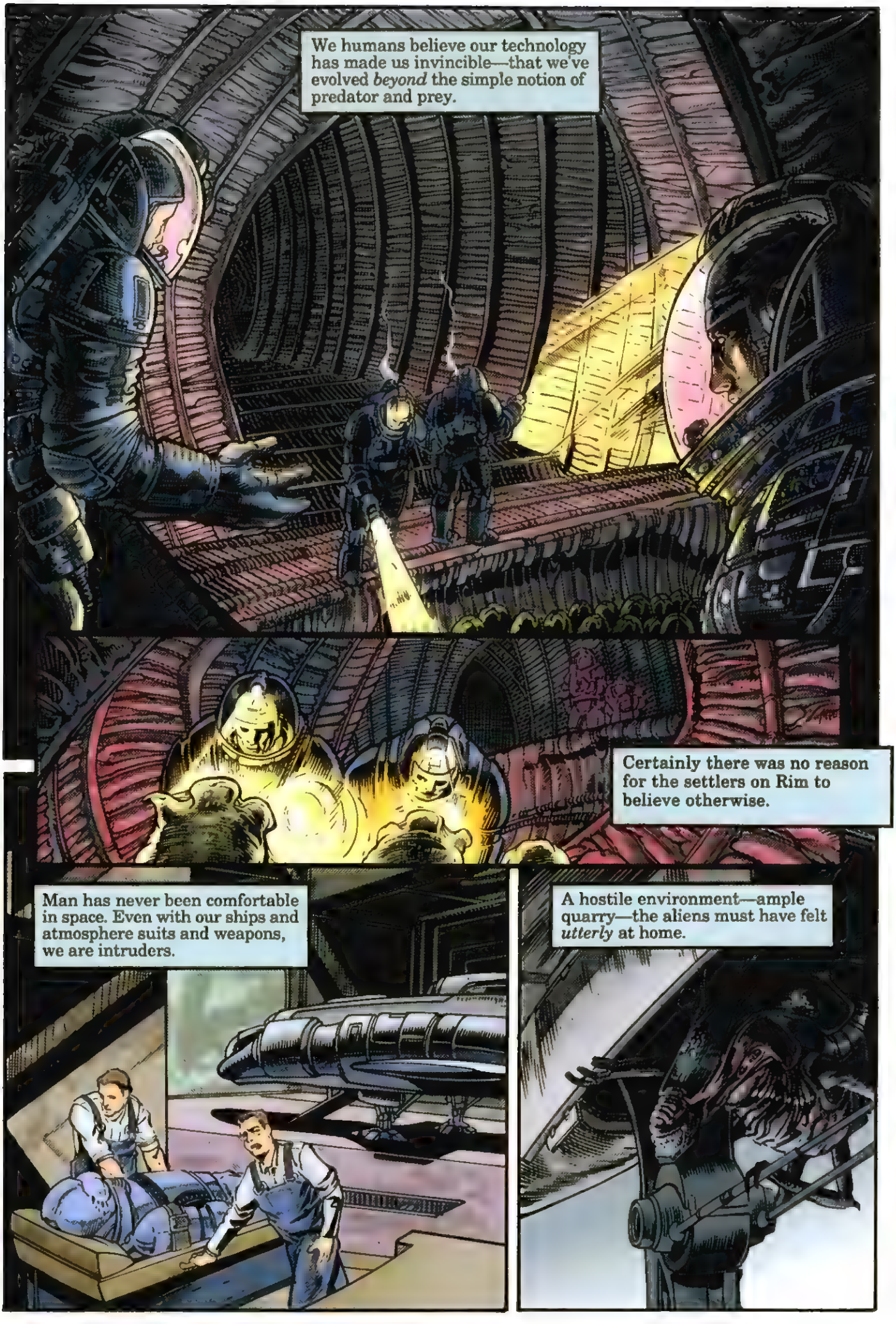

Judging from the alien's dense exoskeleton and remarkable adaptability, we must assume their homeworld to be a harsh, desolate environment.
We know from the encounter on Rim that the aliens have a Queen-based hierarchy. We also know they form hives to protect their young.
At some point, perhaps cyclical, the hive's queen must sense the instinctive need to propagate new colonies, and lays eggs that will later hatch as queen-larvae.
At the proper time, the drones provide host bodies for the fledgling queens.
For many in the research community, this parasitical breeding process is the single most disturbing aspect of the entire alien phenomenon.
Given the aliens' legendary "temperament," it's likely that these special breeding eggs are quickly removed from the queen's chamber and sheltered elsewhere.
Of course, for the aliens, it is completely natural—their equivalent of giving a bottle to a baby.

The actual incubation period is relatively short, a matter of days or even hours.
Birth is an ordeal of pain and violence.
As the fledgling queens emerge, there may well be a battle for dominance. Imagine a species where the first conscious act of life is *killing*.
Even so, I hesitate to imply any sort of "Darwinian" connotation to these struggles.
Killing may merely be a way for the newborn queen to define its own reality.


Soon, the new queen would lead a contingent of drones away from the old hive.
The drones are the queen's slaves, and there would be nothing more important than the construction of the new hive.
If natural building material were unavailable, perhaps other—*elements*—would be substituted.
One would not describe this as cannibalism so much as a remarkably ruthless *practicality*.
The nesting instinct is a powerful one. Early on, all effort would be concentrated on completing the hive.
The aliens would not think in terms of sacrifice. The hive is all. To assume death has *meaning* to these creatures is to deny their *greatest* power.


All ecosystems exist in a delicate state of balance. This would be as true of the alien homeworld as our own.
At home, the aliens would have any number of natural enemies.
Some would live, some would die, and the alien herd would be kept in check.
The bodies of the dead would be used to reinforce the walls of the hive. The cycle would continue. The ecosystem would survive.

The violent, uncontrollable alien infestations occurred when the creatures were *removed* from their natural habitat.
We can only guess how this might have happened. Perhaps it was millions of years ago. Perhaps only decades.
The end result is all that matters. Somehow the aliens were transplanted to other worlds.
The creatures would not be concerned with the particulars of their environment. They would concern themselves only with *circumstances*.
The natural predators were gone. The balance was gone.
All that was left was *prey*.


We humans believe our technology has made us invincible—that we've evolved *beyond* the simple notion of predator and prey.
Certainly there was no reason for the settlers on Rim to believe otherwise.
Man has never been comfortable in space. Even with our ships and atmosphere suits and weapons, we are intruders.
A hostile environment—ample quarry—the aliens must have felt *utterly* at home.

Humans have confused comfort with survival. For us, mere *existence* isn't enough. We demand the *accoutrements* of life as well.
The aliens make no such demands. They live in a very simple world.
They live to kill.
They live to breed.
And finally, they *survive*.

THE ALIEN

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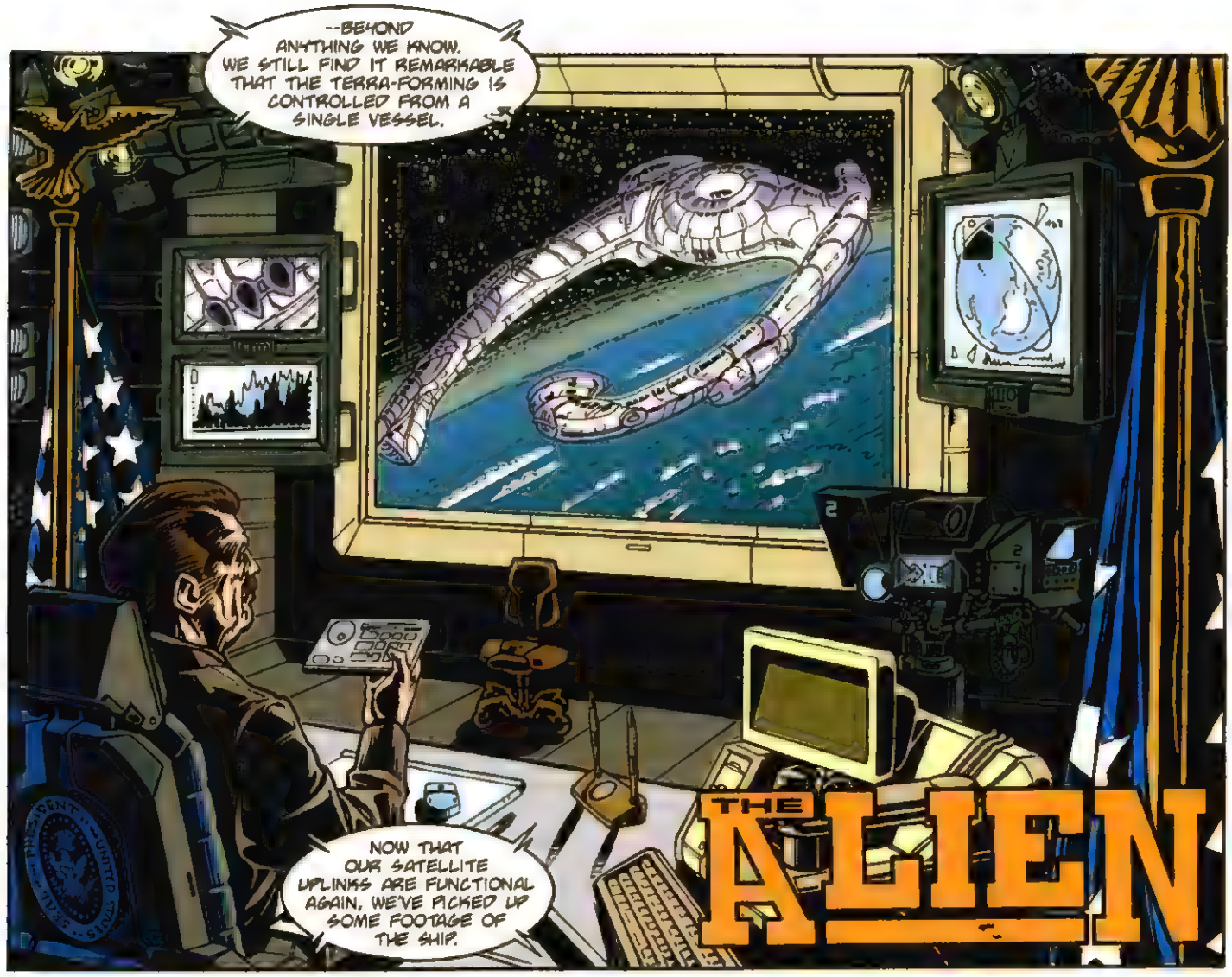
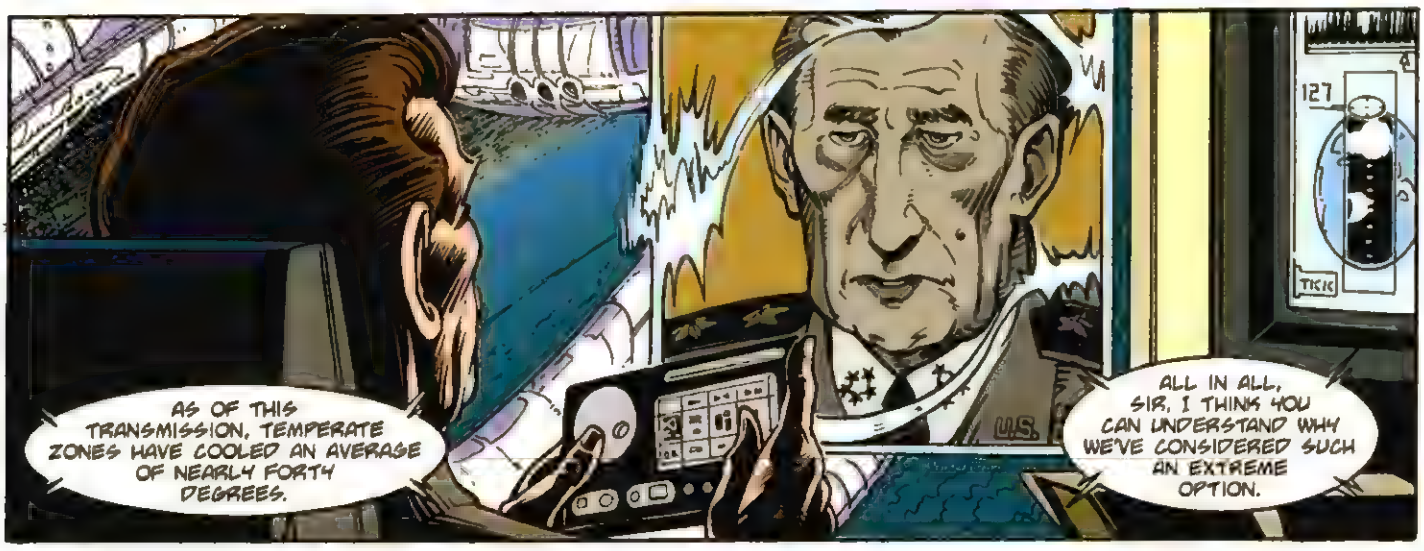

--BEYOND ANYTHING WE KNOW. WE STILL FIND IT REMARKABLE THAT THE TERRA-FORMING IS CONTROLLED FROM A SINGLE VESSEL.
NOW THAT OUR SATELLITE UPLINKS ARE FUNCTIONAL AGAIN, WE'VE PICKED UP SOME FOOTAGE OF THE SHIP.
THE ALIEN

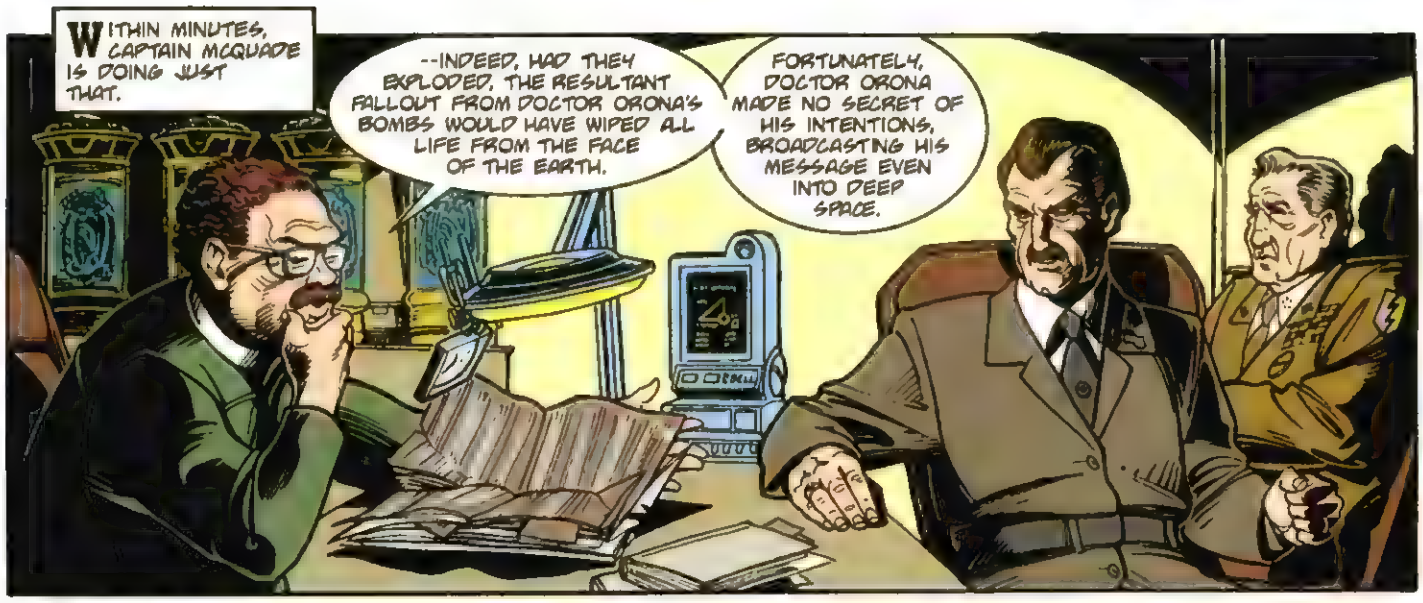

AS OF THIS TRANSMISSION, TEMPERATE ZONES HAVE COOLED AN AVERAGE OF NEARLY FORTY DEGREES.
ALL IN ALL, SIR, I THINK YOU CAN UNDERSTAND WHY WE'VE CONSIDERED SUCH AN EXTREME OPTION.

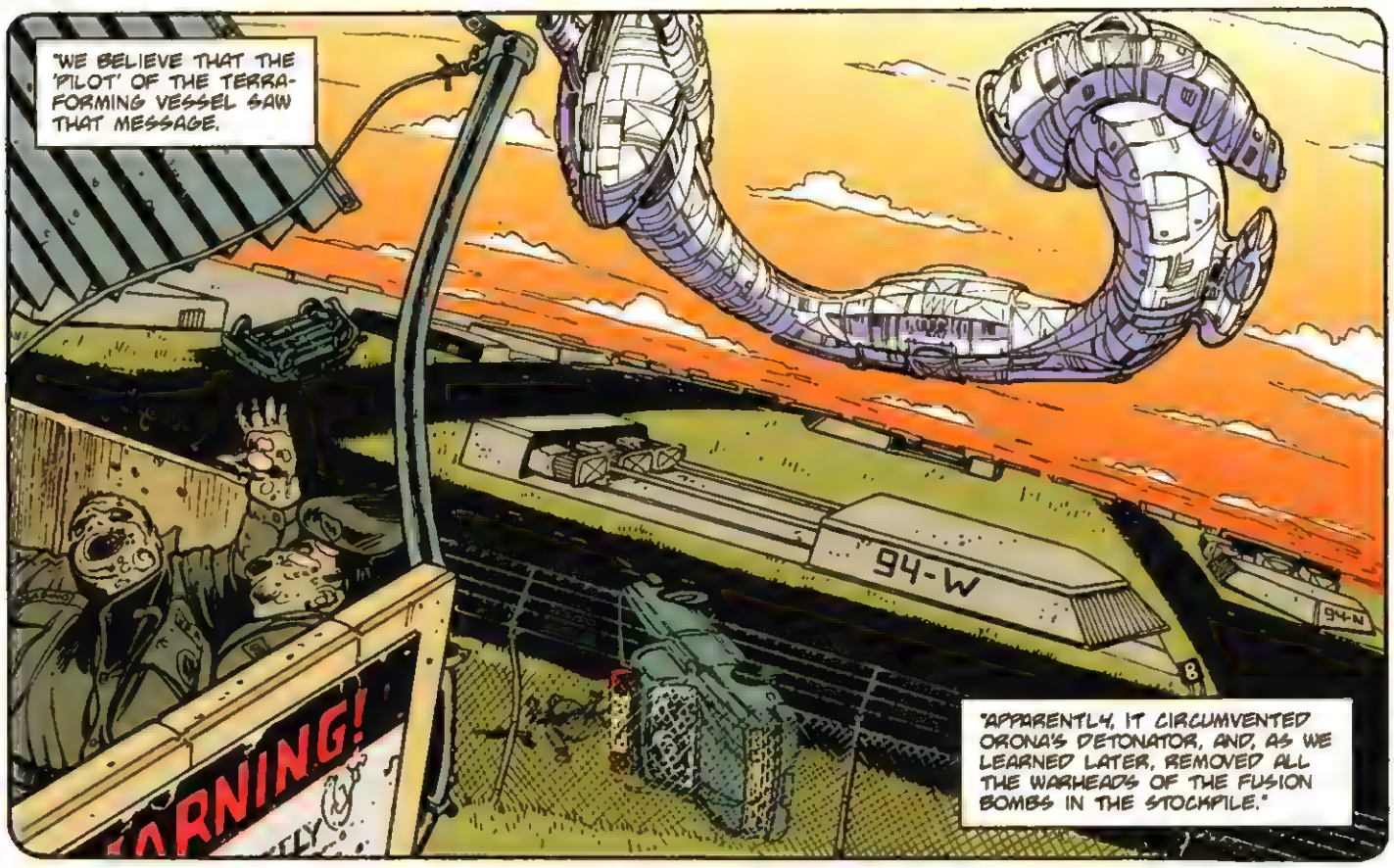
MISTER PRESIDENT? WE'RE ABOUT TO DOCK, SIR.
THANK YOU, EDWARDS.
CLICK

GATEWAY STATION.
GREAT TO HAVE YOU BACK, MISTER PRESIDENT. MAKES ME FEEL A LOT BETTER KNOWING--
CUT THE CRAP, MELNITZ. LET'S JUST GET DOWN TO BUSINESS!

I'VE BEEN REVIEWING YOUR LAST INTELLIGENCE MEMO. ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS?
WELL, WE'VE STARTED TO RE-ESTABLISH A PRESENCE ON THE EARTH'S SURFACE, BUT THE FIGHTING IS STILL VERY TOUGH.

THAT'S ONE THING YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO CLARIFY.
IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT DOCTOR ORONA'S STOCKPILE OF BOMBS WAS GOING TO LEAVE EARTH UNINHABITABLE FOR YEARS TO COME.
WELL, SIR, I THINK CAPTAIN MCQUADE CAN BEST EXPLAIN THAT, AND A LOT MORE, TO YOU.

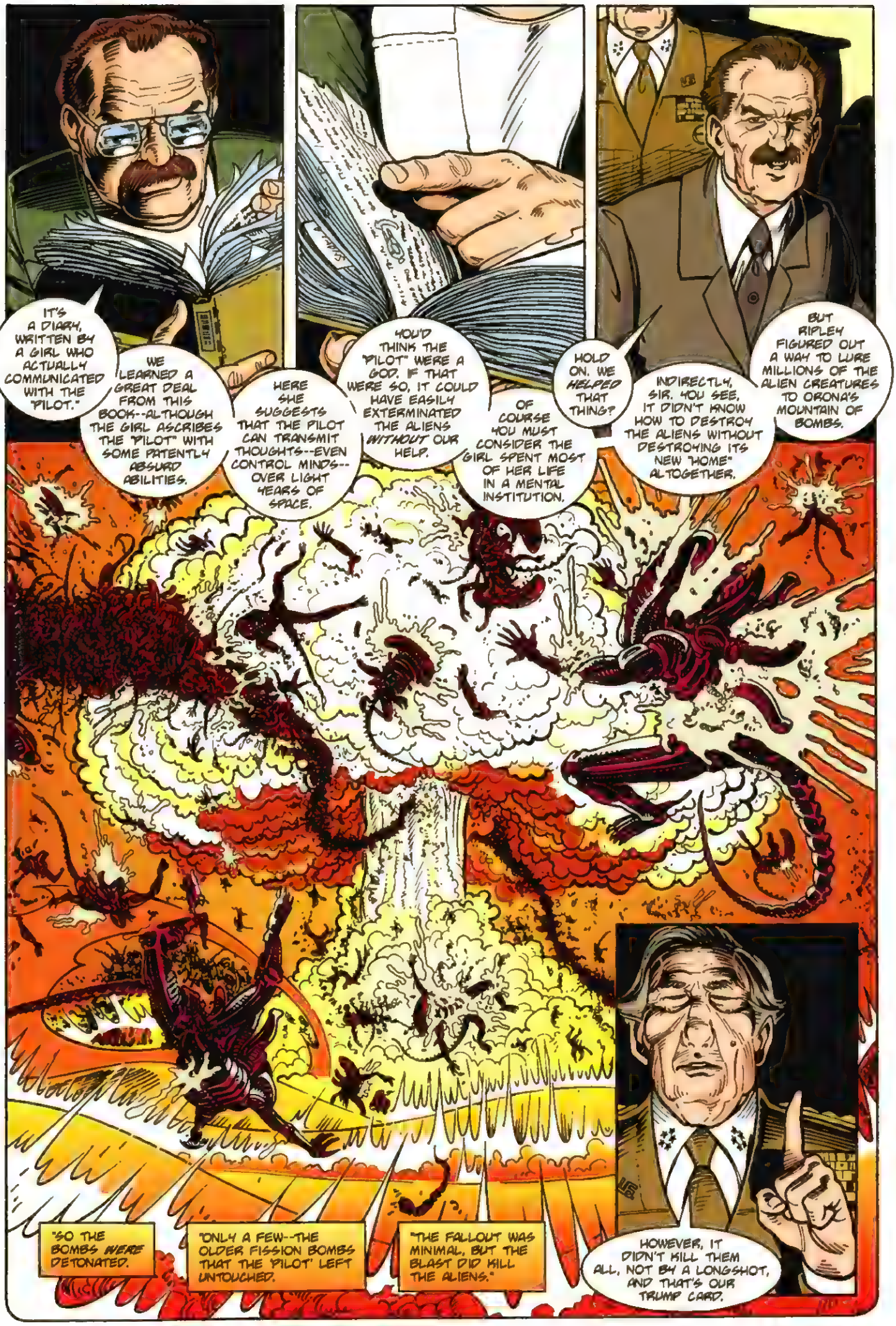

WITHIN MINUTES, CAPTAIN MCQUADE IS DOING JUST THAT.
--INDEED, HAD THEY EXPLODED, THE RESULTANT FALLOUT FROM DOCTOR ORONA'S BOMBS WOULD HAVE WIPED ALL LIFE FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH.
FORTUNATELY, DOCTOR ORONA MADE NO SECRET OF HIS INTENTIONS, BROADCASTING HIS MESSAGE EVEN INTO DEEP SPACE.


"WE BELIEVE THAT THE 'PILOT' OF THE TERRA-FORMING VESSEL SAW THAT MESSAGE.
94-W
"APPARENTLY, IT CIRCUMVENTED ORONA'S DETONATOR, AND, AS WE LEARNED LATER, REMOVED ALL THE WARHEADS OF THE FUSION BOMBS IN THE STOCKPILE."

WHETHER THE "PILOT" WAS GATHERING MATERIALS FOR IT'S PLASMA GENERATOR, OR JUST INSURING THAT ANOTHER LUNATIC WOULDN'T THREATEN HIS NEW HOME, WE DON'T KNOW.
SO THAT'S WHY IT'S CHANGING OUR PLANET? TO MAKE ITSELF A NEW HOME?

FROM THE INFORMATION WE'VE GATHERED, THAT SEEMS TO BE THE CASE.
EXCUSE MY SKEPTICISM, BUT THE SEVERITY OF THE SITUATION LEADS ME TO ASK--
--JUST WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GETTING THIS "INFORMATION"?

THROUGH LONG OBSERVATION, SIR...
...AND THIS BOOK.

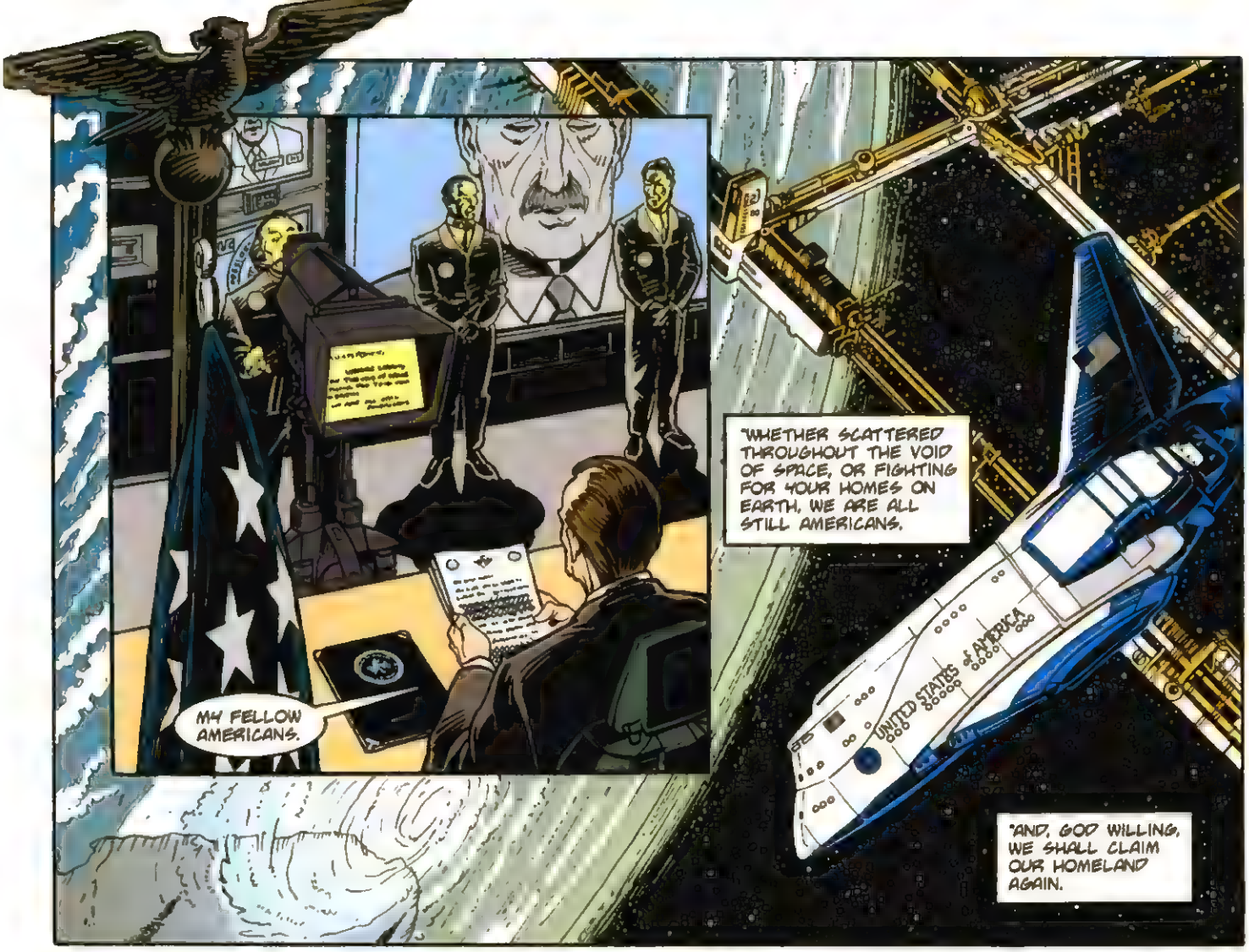

IT'S A DIARY, WRITTEN BY A GIRL WHO ACTUALLY COMMUNICATED WITH THE "PILOT."
WE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL FROM THIS BOOK--ALTHOUGH THE GIRL ASCRIBES THE "PILOT" WITH SOME PATENTLY ABSURD ABILITIES.
HERE SHE SUGGESTS THAT THE PILOT CAN TRANSMIT THOUGHTS--EVEN CONTROL MINDS--OVER LIGHT YEARS OF SPACE.
YOU'D THINK THE "PILOT" WERE A GOD. IF THAT WERE SO, IT COULD HAVE EASILY EXTERMINATED THE ALIENS *WITHOUT* OUR HELP.
OF COURSE YOU MUST CONSIDER THE GIRL SPENT MOST OF HER LIFE IN A MENTAL INSTITUTION.
HOLD ON. WE *HELPED* THAT THING?
INDIRECTLY, SIR. YOU SEE, IT DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO DESTROY THE ALIENS WITHOUT DESTROYING ITS NEW "HOME" ALTOGETHER.
BUT RIPLEY FIGURED OUT A WAY TO LURE MILLIONS OF THE ALIEN CREATURES TO ORONA'S MOUNTAIN OF BOMBS.
"SO THE BOMBS *WERE* DETONATED.
"ONLY A FEW--THE OLDER FISSION BOMBS THAT THE 'PILOT' LEFT UNTOUCHED.
"THE FALLOUT WAS MINIMAL, BUT THE BLAST DID KILL THE ALIENS."
HOWEVER, IT DIDN'T KILL THEM ALL, NOT BY A LONGSHOT, AND THAT'S OUR TRUMP CARD.

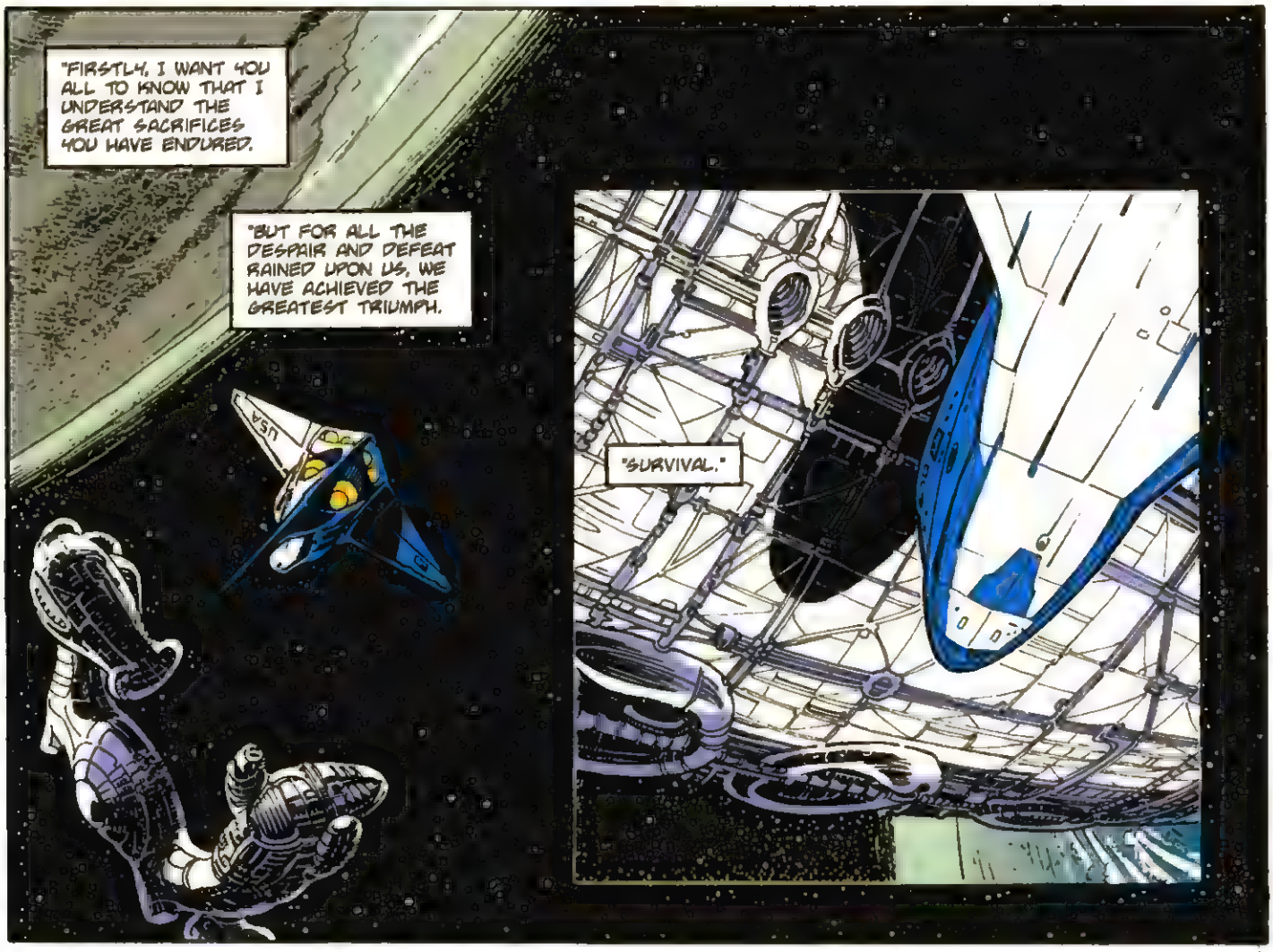
WE'VE DETERMINED THAT THE "PILOT" HATES AND FEARS THE ALIEN CREATURES AS MUCH AS WE DO. PERHAPS MORE SO.
DOD
WORLD WAR III MONITOR
EYES ONLY
TAKE A LOOK AT THE SCREEN, SIR. WE'VE BEEN BROADCASTING THESE IMAGES FOR WEEKS NOW.
CURRENTLY ACTIVE HIVES IN BRAZIL--
--LOS ANGELES--
--BUFFALO, AND THIRTY SEVEN OTHER SITES.

AND THIS "PILOT," HE'S BEEN MONITORING THESE BROADCASTS?
APPARENTLY, SIR. HE CONTACTED US WITH THE MESSAGE WE RELAYED TO YOU.
HIS INSTRUCTIONS WERE QUITE CLEAR.
THEN THERE REALLY IS NO OTHER WAY, IS THERE?
NO, SIR, I DON'T THINK SO.

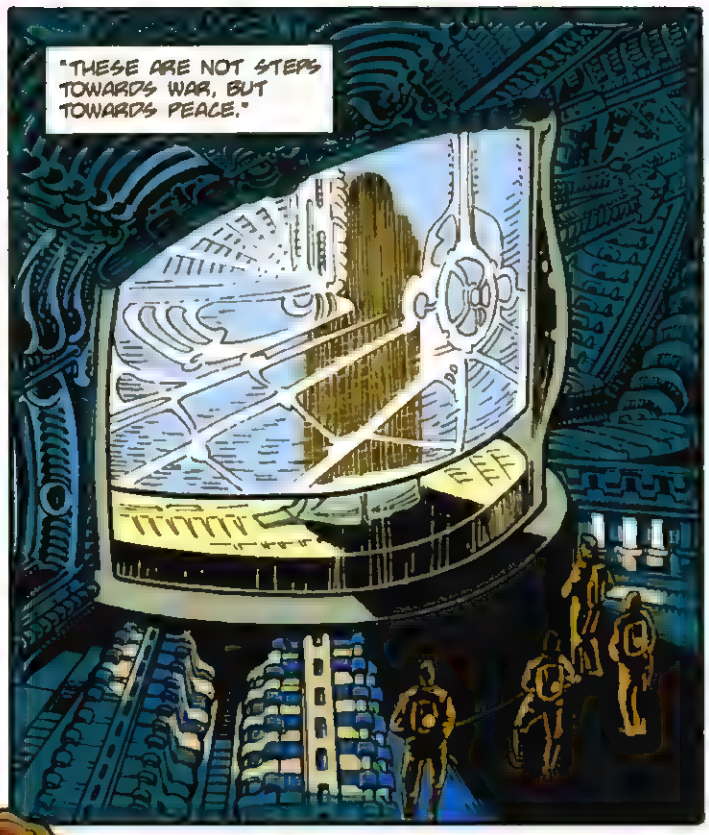
NOW, YOU SHOULD KNOW THE "PILOT" CAN COMMUNICATE HIS OWN THOUGHTS, BUT FIELD TESTS HAVE SHOWN THAT HE CAN'T READ OUR THOUGHTS.
SO YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT COMPROMISING--
GENTLEMEN, PLEASE--

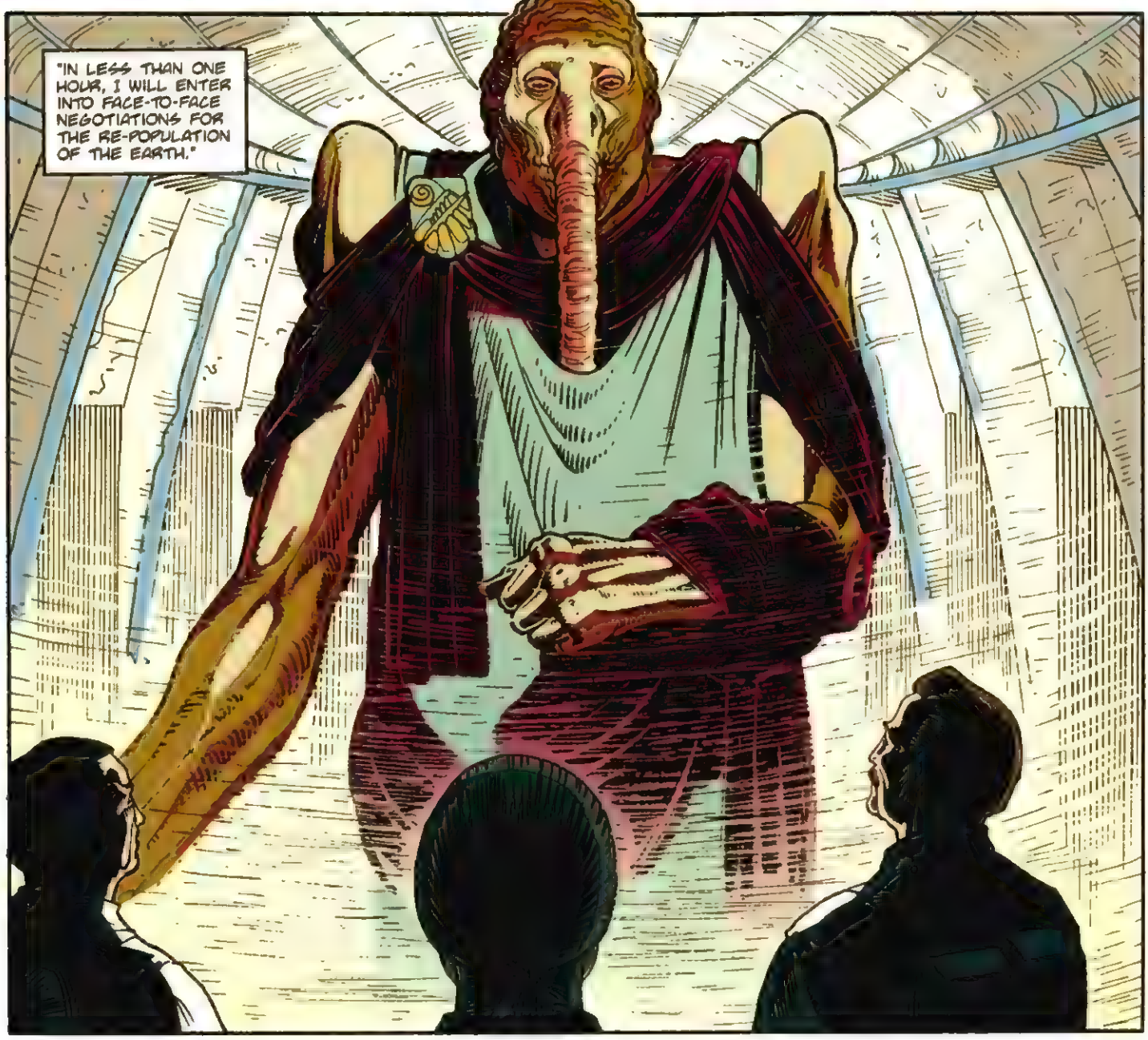
--PLEASE, I JUST WANT TO BE ALONE FOR A WHILE.
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE FOR A LITTLE BIT.


MY FELLOW AMERICANS.
"WHETHER SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE VOID OF SPACE, OR FIGHTING FOR YOUR HOMES ON EARTH, WE ARE ALL STILL AMERICANS.
UNITED STATES of AMERICA
"AND, GOD WILLING, WE SHALL CLAIM OUR HOMELAND AGAIN.


"FIRSTLY, I WANT YOU ALL TO KNOW THAT I UNDERSTAND THE GREAT SACRIFICES YOU HAVE ENDURED.
"BUT FOR ALL THE DESPAIR AND DEFEAT RAINED UPON US, WE HAVE ACHIEVED THE GREATEST TRIUMPH.
USA
"SURVIVAL."

"AFTER MANY HOURS OF DEBATE, AND LONG SESSIONS WITH MY ADVISORS, I HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TOWARDS REALIZING THE FRUITS OF THAT TRIUMPH."
ARK


"THESE ARE NOT STEPS TOWARDS WAR, BUT TOWARDS PEACE."


"IN LESS THAN ONE HOUR, I WILL ENTER INTO FACE-TO-FACE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE RE-POPULATION OF THE EARTH."

SURELY, THIS IS A BRILLIANT CREATURE, CAPABLE OF SINGLE HANDEDLY ALTERING THE CLIMATES OF THE ENTIRE EARTH.

BUT THE EYES CONVEY NO INTELLECT AT ALL. THEY ARE VOID OF EXPRESSION AND FEELING. COLD. EMPTY.

LIKE THE EYES OF A DEAD ANIMAL.

Uuhh!

THESE ARE THE PRESIDENT'S THOUGHTS, JUST AS A BRIGHT FLASH EXPLODES WITHIN HIS BRAIN.

THE PILOT HAS MADE CONTACT.

SIR? ARE YOU--

I'M-- I'M FINE.

IT...*HE* WANTS US TO GO...THIS WAY.

BUT FIRST... WE MUST ALL DISROBE.

COMPLETELY.

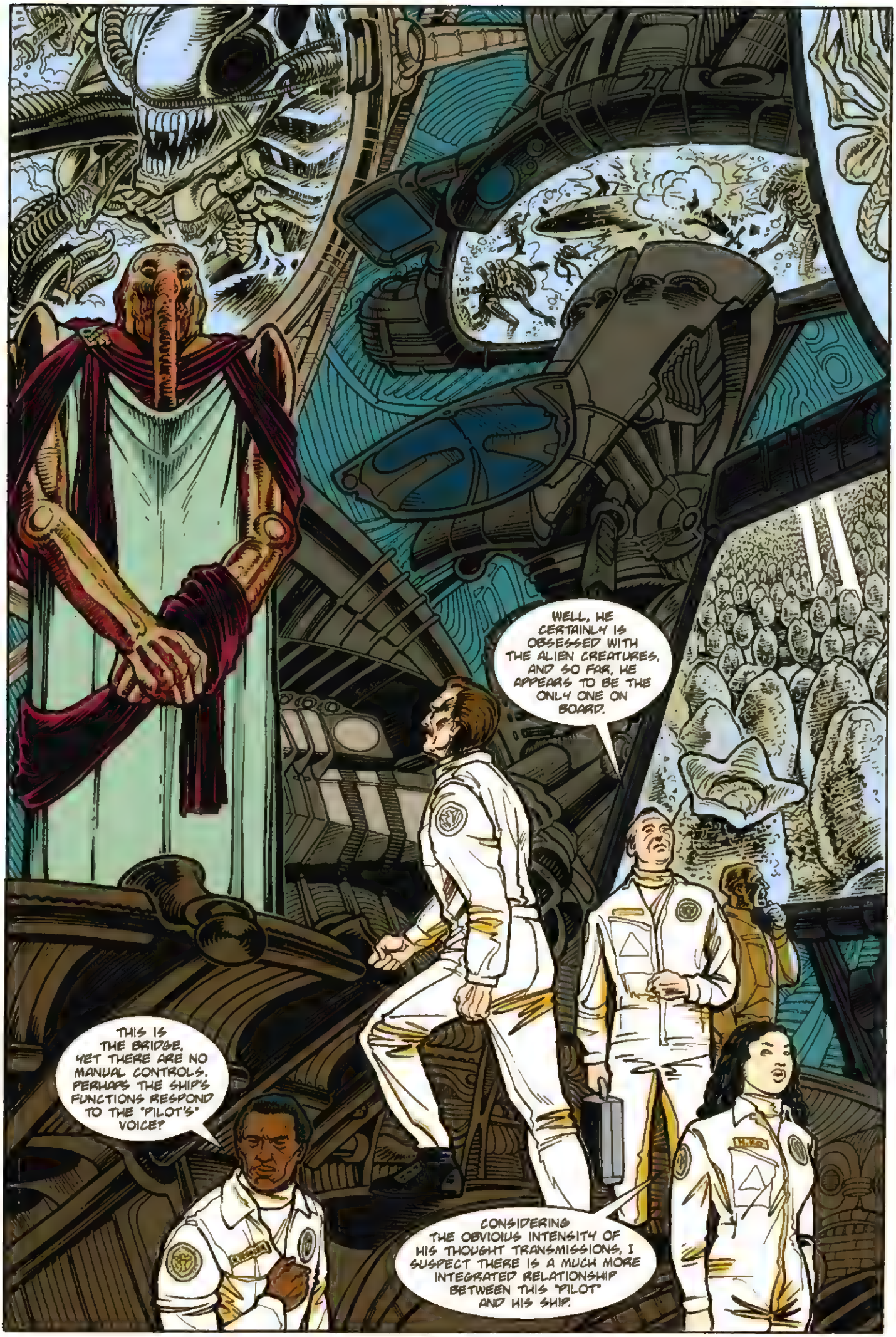
I KNOW HE'S ONLY RELAYING THE BEING'S THOUGHTS, BUT HE SEEMS TO BE IN A TRANCE.

PERHAPS WE WERE WRONG. MAYBE THIS "PILOT" CAN READ AND CONTROL MINDS.

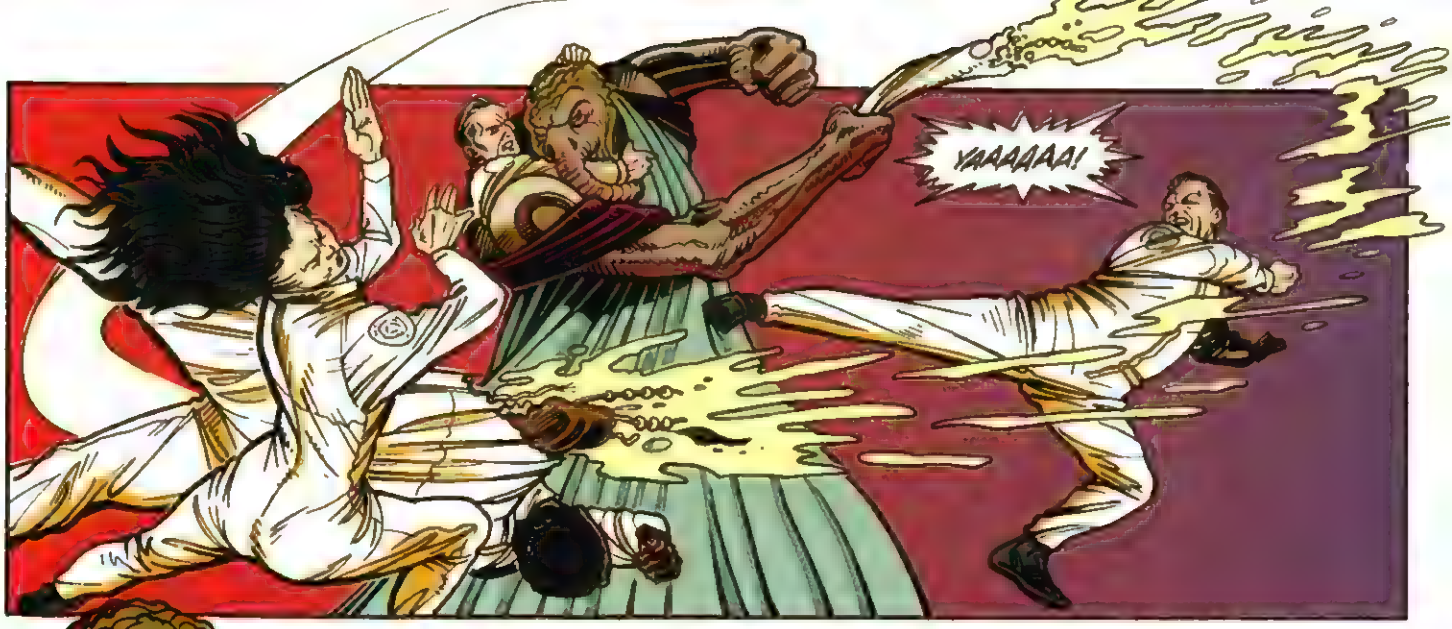
NOT A CHANCE. IF THAT THING COULD READ MINDS, IT WOULD HAVE DESTROYED US ALL BY NOW.

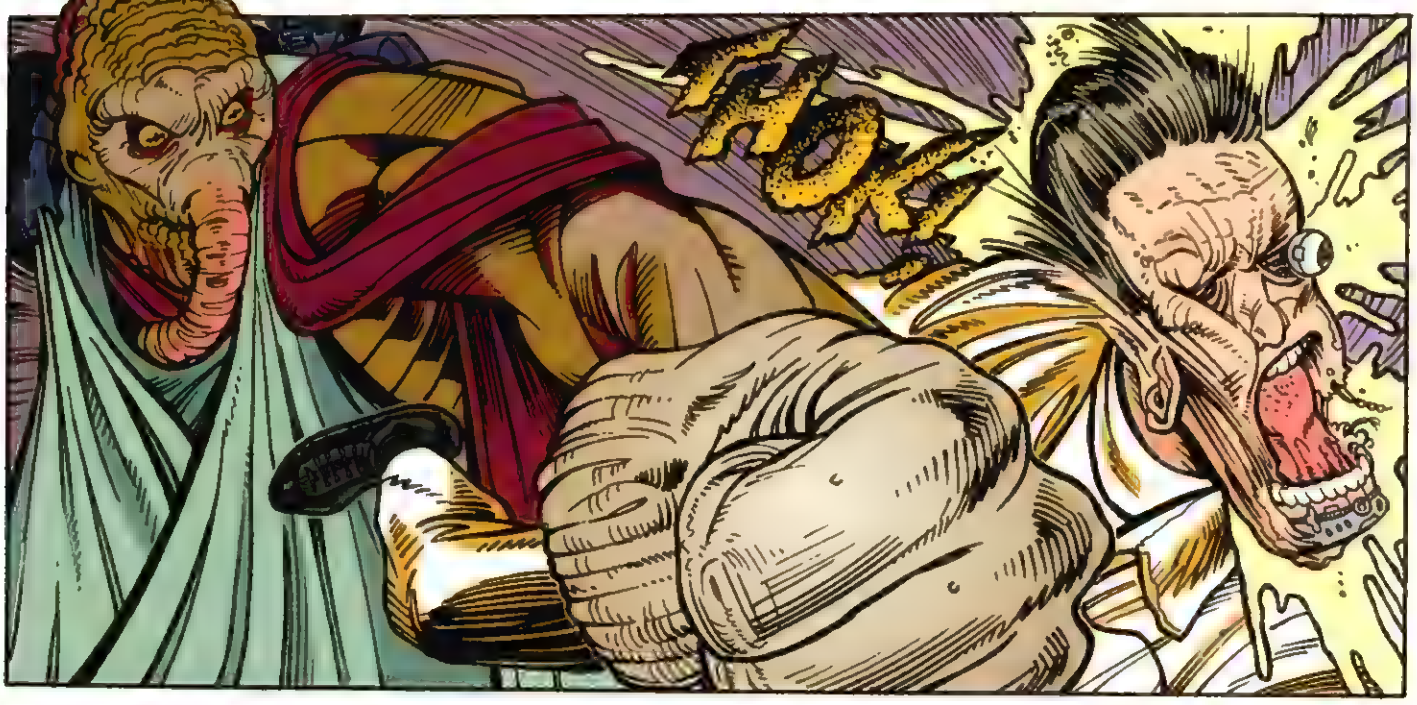
OUR CLOTHES ARE IN THE OTHER ROOM.

THEN WE'RE TO GO UP TO THE BRIDGE, WHERE THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BEGIN.


WELL, HE CERTAINLY IS OBSESSED WITH THE ALIEN CREATURES, AND SO FAR, HE APPEARS TO BE THE ONLY ONE ON BOARD.
THIS IS THE BRIDGE, YET THERE ARE NO MANUAL CONTROLS. PERHAPS THE SHIP'S FUNCTIONS RESPOND TO THE "PILOT'S" VOICE?
CONSIDERING THE OBVIOUS INTENSITY OF HIS THOUGHT TRANSMISSIONS, I SUSPECT THERE IS A MUCH MORE INTEGRATED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS "PILOT" AND HIS SHIP.

YES, YES, I ALSO HOPE WE CAN SETTLE THIS QUICKLY AND PEACEFULLY.
THIS IS SECRETARY OF STATE, ROBERT TESSIER.
WHUCK!
HOW DID HE FIGURE IT OUT?
DOESN'T MATTER. WE MUST EMPLOY OUR CONTIGENCY PLAN.


YAAAAAA!


FAK

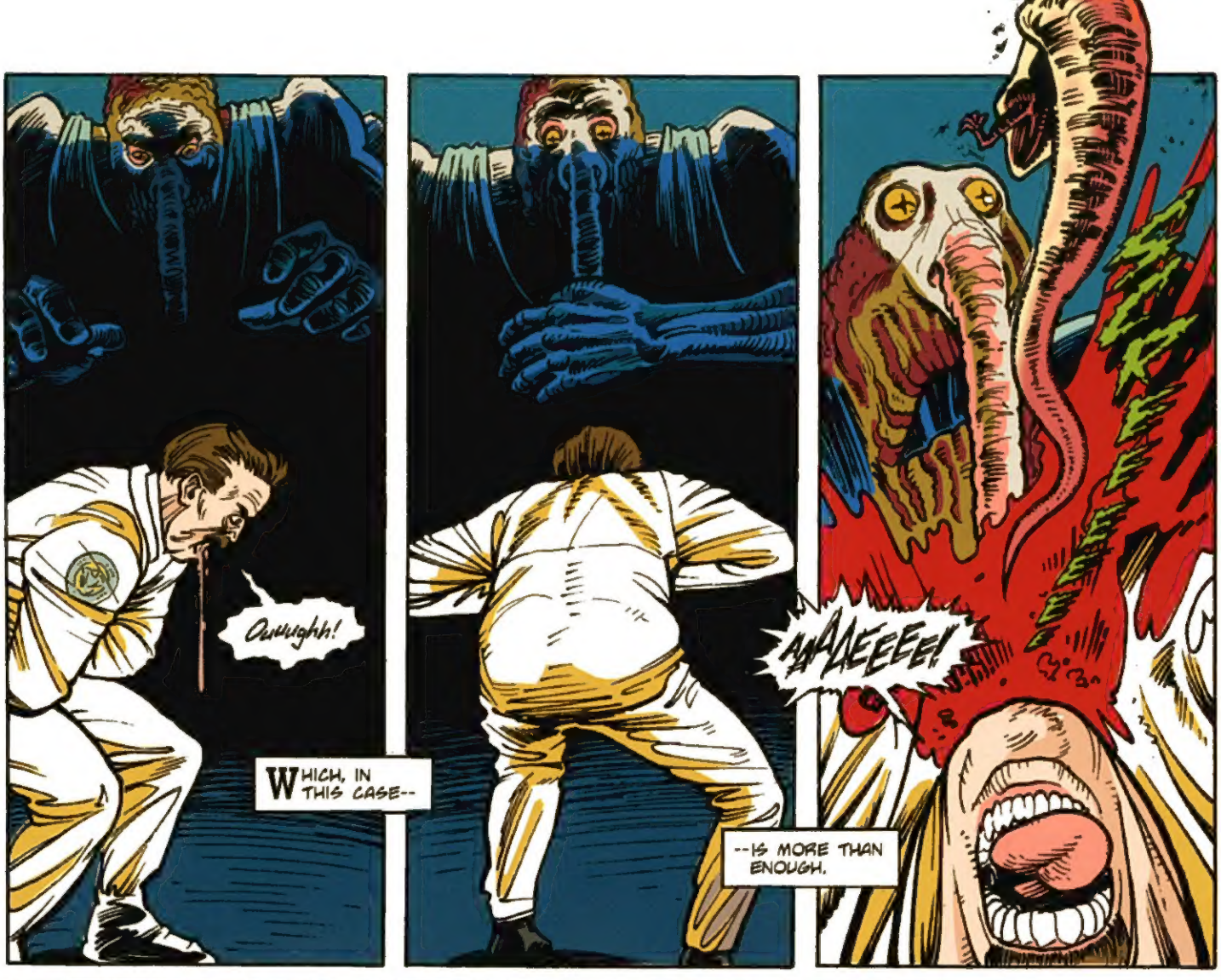
SIR, YOU MUST MOVE QUICKLY. HESITATION COULD BE--

FWAP

I'LL GIVE YOU CREDIT. YOU'RE A HELL OF A LOT STRONGER THAN WE THOUGHT.
SMARTER TOO. EVEN I COULDN'T TELL THOSE ANDROIDS WEREN'T HUMAN.

BUT YOU HAVEN'T GOT ALL THE ANGLES COVERED.
A SYNTHETIC TOOTH DOES NOT AFFORD A VERY LARGE CHAMBER FOR CONCEALMENT.

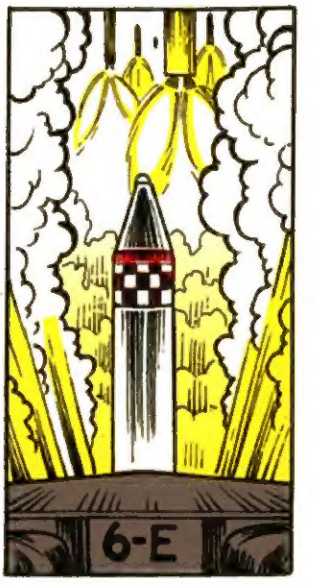
IN FACT, THIS ONE HOUSES LESS THAN A GRAM OF LIQUID.

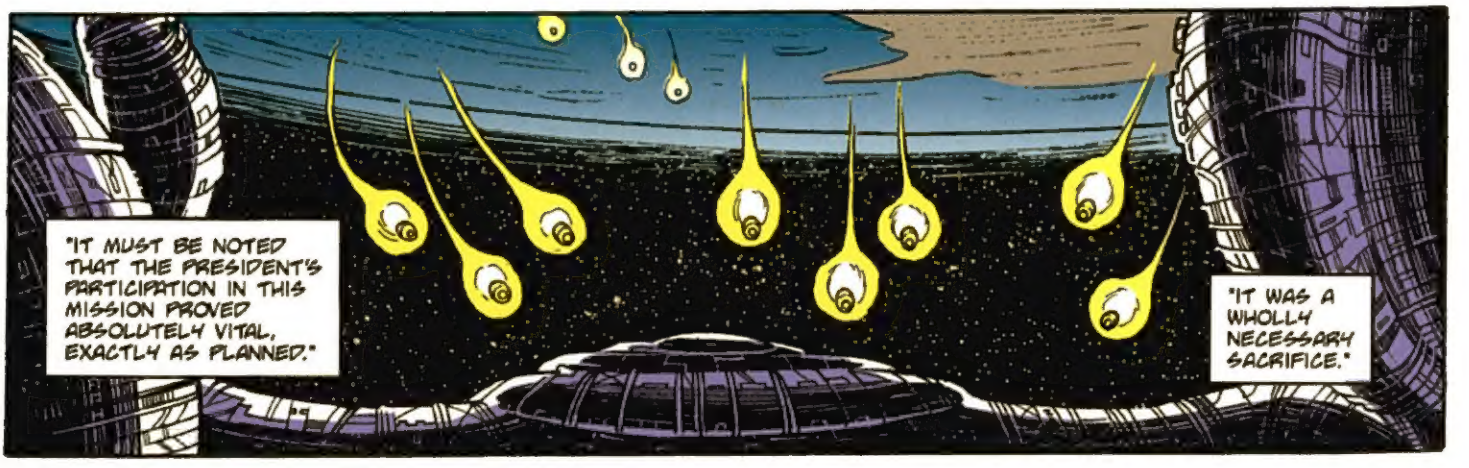

Ouuughh!
WHICH, IN THIS CASE--
--IS MORE THAN ENOUGH.
AAAEEEE!
SLICE

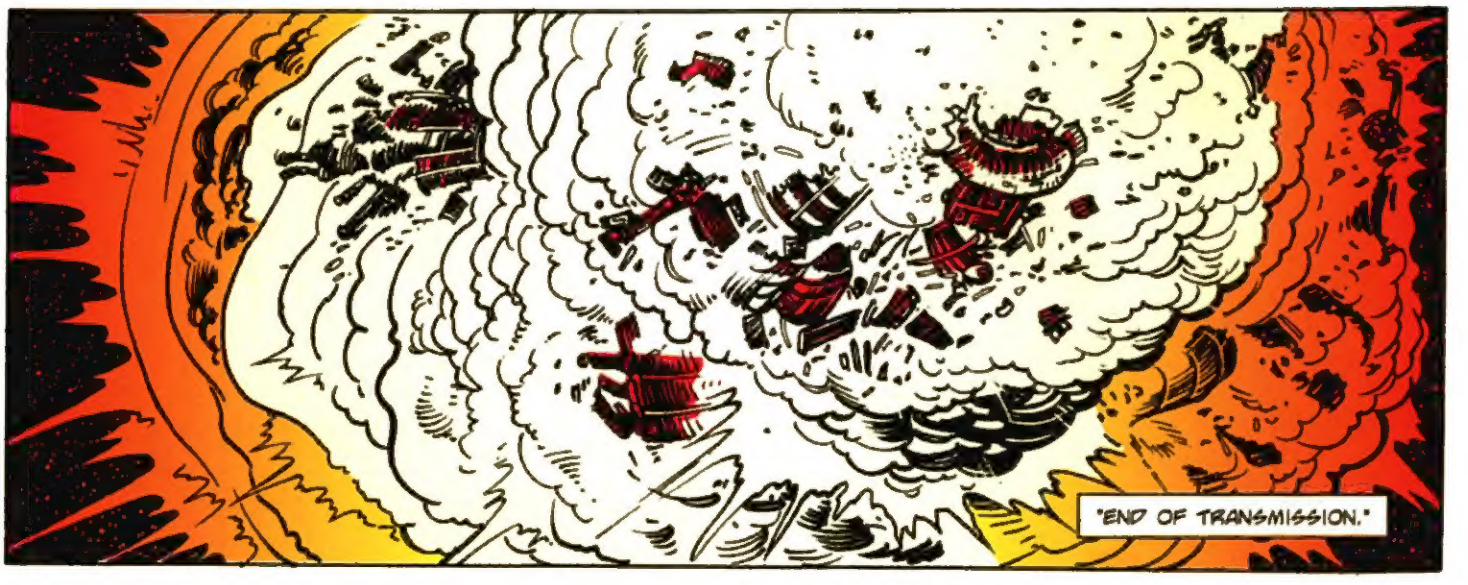
GYOWWWWW

6E

MITCHELL TO CENTRAL COMMAND.
ENEMY VESSEL OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED. I REPEAT OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED.
OUR SCHEDULED OFFENSIVE SHOULD BE LAUNCHED IMMEDIATELY.


6-E


"IT MUST BE NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN THIS MISSION PROVED ABSOLUTELY VITAL, EXACTLY AS PLANNED."
"IT WAS A WHOLLY NECESSARY SACRIFICE."


"END OF TRANSMISSION."

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